

2003

# The construction of ecstasy as a social problem in Toronto newspapers (Ontario).

Sean Cristin. Miller  
*University of Windsor*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Miller, Sean Cristin., "The construction of ecstasy as a social problem in Toronto newspapers (Ontario)." (2003). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 3804.

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email ([scholarship@uwindsor.ca](mailto:scholarship@uwindsor.ca)) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.

# NOTE TO USERS

Page(s) not included in the original manuscript and are unavailable from the author or university. The manuscript was scanned as received.

This reproduction is the best copy available.



THE CONSTRUCTION OF ECSTASY AS A  
SOCIAL PROBLEM IN TORONTO NEWSPAPERS

By

Sean Miller

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2003

© Sean Miller



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file   Votre référence*

*ISBN: 0-612-82887-5*

*Our file   Notre référence*

*ISBN: 0-612-82887-5*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

**Canada**

## ABSTRACT

Since the early 1990's there has been a considerable amount of attention given to ecstasy and raves in Toronto. This study examines newspaper coverage of ecstasy through a content analysis of all articles about ecstasy appearing in the *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail* and *National Post* from 1988 to 2002. Using a "contextual" constructionist perspective, claims-making activities of various individuals and/or groups is examined. Claims are contrasted with "objective evidence" to illustrate their constructed nature. It is concluded that ecstasy use in Toronto is not the "social problem" it is made out to be in newspaper accounts. A short discussion of possible reasons, other than objective harm, for the panic over ecstasy is offered.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This thesis would not have been possible without the attention, guidance and dedication of my three committee members: Randy, Jackie and Valerie. Thank you all for the considerable time and effort you invested. After witnessing the incredible amount of work each of you does, I am extra-appreciative of your patience with me.

Randy, I'm very fortunate to have had you as my advisor. Since the first day of graduate school you have been there to help me along the way. I owe you many thanks for all that you have done.

Jackie, Thank you for stimulating my interest in sociology and recommending that I pursue a graduate degree. I am indebted for the countless hours you've spent editing my work. I'm amazed at how many obvious, and some not so obvious, errors I made in my writing.

Valerie, Trying to find an external reader during the summer months could have been quite nerve wracking. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this project and sharing your vast knowledge of the subject.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>13</b>
Theoretical Perspective	
Literature Review	
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>28</b>
Data sources	
Qualitative/quantitative analysis	
Measurement	
Coding	
Units of analysis	
Data analysis	
Reliability	
Validity	
Ethical implications	
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: TOPICS OF COVERAGE</b>	<b>40</b>
Location of articles in newspapers	
Visual imagery	
Location of events and issues	
Extent of coverage	
Portrayal of ecstasy	
Ecstasy is not a drug	
Adulteration	
Toronto: The world's ecstasy center	
Violence/Guns	
Endangered neighbors	
Sexual assault	
Addiction	
Allan Ho	
Allan Ho inquest	
Erroneous and misleading claims	
Descriptions of ecstasy users	
Evidence of "objective harm"	

<b>CHAPTER FIVE: CLAIMS-MAKERS</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Law enforcement officials</b>	
<b>Mayor Mel Lastman</b>	
<b>Police Chief Julian Fantino</b>	
<b>Steven Kish</b>	
<b>Jim Cairns</b>	
<b>Ravers</b>	
<b>CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>NEWSPAPER REFERENCES</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>History timeline</b>	
<b>Research questions</b>	
<b>VITA AUCTORIS</b>	<b>133</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

	PAGE
Table 1	Coverage of ecstasy in three Toronto newspapers 31
Table 2	Number of lines of print devoted to ecstasy/raves articles 31
Table 3	Photograph images in newspapers 42
Table 4	Frequency distribution for location of events and issues 43
Table 5	Identification of the drug 48
Table 6	Definers of the “ecstasy problem” 79

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout this century concern over drug use has gone through cycles of increased awareness and indifference. Often one specific drug will become the focus of media, politicians and the public and various social problems will be attributed to this substance. Alcohol, marijuana and crack cocaine have each demonstrated this pattern. Great concern is expressed for a period of time and then it tapers off and a new acceptance or tolerance of the drug emerges without any change in the harm posed by the drug itself. This cyclical nature of anxiety forces us to ask why attention to a particular drug surfaces when it does. The answer does not always depend on a drug's potential for harm as measured with objective criteria, such as the number of deaths. The degree of panic associated with a particular drug depends more upon the wider cultural and political context than on any intrinsic qualities of the chemical itself.

For the last several years there has been a lot of attention directed to the dangers of ecstasy use. Ecstasy use is often portrayed as a virtual epidemic among teenagers. Alarmist headlines such as "Danger Parties" (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*), "Drugs, Death and Dancing" (7 May 2000, *Toronto Star*) and "The Agony Over Ecstasy" (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*) are commonplace. Yet there rarely seems to be factual information or statistics to back these claims. Instead, mistaken beliefs about this drug are being circulated. For example, although portrayed as a new drug, ecstasy was created almost one hundred years ago (Oh, 2000:44). Until recently, however, the level of concern about it has been minimal. More people are using it than in the past, but the vast majority of society have still never tried it. I am not suggesting ecstasy is a totally benign

substance or that it should be considered socially acceptable, but I believe the amount of attention it recently received is disproportionate in relation to its actual threat.

'Ecstasy' is the most commonly used nickname for the chemical structure 3, 4 methylenedioxymethylamphetamine. In scientific and medical circles it is generally known as MDMA. Ecstasy has also been referred to as XTC, X, E, Adam, Love Doves, M&M's, Biscuits, Mickey and Rhapsody to name a few (Joseph, 2000:8). Occasionally writers use MDMA when referring to the known chemical and ecstasy when discussing the illegal, unknown substance. While it is important to note that what is sold as ecstasy often contains adulterants, distinguishing the two names is more a matter of social context and marketing than composition or purity. Therefore the terms ecstasy and MDMA are used interchangeably throughout this work unless specifically noted otherwise to illustrate a point. Attempts to separate the two names may be well intended but can end up resulting in confusion. For example, even after a year of heavy coverage on the subject, the *Toronto Star* erroneously described MDMA as a "cheaper close cousin of the rave drug ecstasy" (12 April 2001).

Contrary to popular opinion, ecstasy is not a combination or blending of different drugs. Rumour would suggest ecstasy consists of a mixture of cocaine, heroin, LSD and various other nefarious substances such as rat poison. This chemical cocktail notion, however, is completely false. In fact, ecstasy is a "pure" synthesized substance with its own distinct chemical makeup (Joseph, 2000:8). In addition to the distinct structural features of ecstasy, the reported subjective effects also set it apart from other substances. Unlike most anti-anxiety drugs there is no clouding of consciousness or sedation and unlike other amphetamine type drugs there is rarely agitation or paranoia (Eisner, 1994:3,



Holland, 2001:8). The drug's effects are described as easily controllable and resembling antidepressants such as Prozac but on a more profound, immediate level (Joseph, 2000:47, Holland, 2001:8). Two of the most commonly cited effects of ecstasy are enhanced communication and the exploration of interpersonal relationships (Eisner, 1994:33). Due to the distinct structure and effects many chemists feel that ecstasy deserves its own classification, with empathogen (meaning "empathy generating" substance) and entactogen being the most frequently used terms (Cohen, 1994:17-18, Holland, 2001:8, Eisner, 1994:33-73).

When in pure form ecstasy is a white crystalline powder. Although increasingly sold in this manner to allow snorting, ecstasy is usually in tablet or capsule form. Ecstasy has a threshold effect, requiring at least 75 mg for results to be felt. Most pills contain between 80-120 mg of active ingredient, however, pills with concentrations of over 200mg have been recorded (Silcott and Push, 2000:7). Body weight, tolerance levels, route of administration and general physical and mental state of the user influence the effects felt (Silcott and Push, 2000:8). The circumstances, or setting, in which ecstasy is consumed can also affect results (Beck and Rosenbaum, 1994:27-41, Joseph, 2000:15). For better or worse ecstasy is associated with raves and mention of one seldom occurs in absence of the other. Although often taken at raves, use is not confined to such events (Beck and Rosebaum, 1994:1-10, Saunders, 1995:126-140).

Ecstasy is illegal and therefore there is no government regulated quality control. What is sold as ecstasy often varies tremendously in purity and content (McCall, 2001:106, Saunders, 1995:77, Fritz, 1999:147-149). Some pills will contain pure MDMA, others will be adulterated. Some will be composed entirely of another substance,

and some will contain no illegal ingredients. Illegal adulterants are often methamphetamine (speed) or the chemical cousin of ecstasy MDE (also known as Eve) (Silcott and Push, 2000:7). It is more common for pills to contain legal substances such as caffeine, decongestants and cough suppressants as they are easier to obtain (Holland, 2001:163). Despite popular perception, it is questionable whether heroin has ever been found in ecstasy pills (Silcott and Push, 2000:7, Holland, 2001:163, Fritz, 1999:148, Cloud, 2000:40). Ecstasy is cheaper and easier to produce than heroin and therefore it would not be cost effective for manufacturers to market heroin pills as MDMA (Holland, 2001:56). Likewise the effects of heroin are very different than ecstasy and word would likely spread about impostor pills (Holland, 2001:56). It is also unlikely that ecstasy dealers would use heroin as an adulterant because the penalty is much more severe than it is for ecstasy (Holland, 2001:155).

Although ecstasy is often categorized as a designer drug, this label is somewhat misleading and has likely added to the stigma attached to the drug. According to the common definition a designer drug is a variation of an already controlled drug. This imitation will be created to make a drug cheaper, stronger, and more effective (Jenkins, 1999:6). By this definition ecstasy is not a designer drug. Categorizing ecstasy under the label "designer drug" has led to erroneous associations with overdoses, Parkinson's Disease and "date rape drugs" (Holland, 2001:54-57). The implications of categorizing ecstasy as a "designer drug" will be discussed in chapter four.

Compared to many illicit substances the history of ecstasy is brief and fairly easily traceable. Although public attention recently focused on this drug, its discovery actually dates back almost one hundred years. In 1912 the German pharmaceutical

company E. Merck, while trying to create a medication to stop bleeding, stumbled across MDMA (Oh, 2000:44). Many people believe that MDMA was created as an appetite suppressant, however, examination of the patent application reveals no such intent (Silcott and Push, 2000:22). MDMA was listed as an intermediate structural compound, meaning that it possessed properties judged to contain constituents for therapeutically active compounds (Cohen, 1994:4). Although MDMA may produce appetite-suppressing effects on some users it was never intended or marketed as such (Cohen, 1994:4). This myth is just one of several pieces of misleading information that have created confusion over the substance. Another interesting myth tells of British and German soldiers during the First World War laying down their guns, claiming a cease-fire and playing a game of football together after taking the newly invented drug (Joseph, 2000:19; Silcott and Push, 2000:23). In 1914 Merck received the patent for MDMA. Slight modifications were made in the drug over the next five years, however, the drug basically sat on the shelf for the next forty years (Joseph, 2000:19; Oh, 2000:44).

During the early 1950's a series of experiments were conducted at the University of Michigan, with support from the United States Army, to test the potential of eight psychotropic drugs as espionage or brainwashing weapons (Cohen, 1994:6; Cloud, 2000:38). Lethal dose tests were performed on non-human subjects which included mice, rats, guinea pigs, dogs and monkeys to determine the dosage needed to kill the animals in order to establish an upper limit for use with humans. The study found that none of the substances under review were particularly toxic (Cloud, 2000:38). In particular MDMA, designated by the code name EA 1475, proved to be an unsuitable brainwashing weapon

and was found to be less toxic than MDA, a substance to which it has been compared (Cohen, 1994:6).

Human consumption of MDMA is believed to have first occurred in the late 1960's, however, there is no solid proof to validate this claim (Cohen, 1994:7). It was not until 1972, when a sample obtained by the Chicago police department was analyzed, that the first documented human usage was verified (Holland, 2001:12). The report produced by this laboratory indicated that MDMA was being taken recreationally by individuals in search of a spiritual high. Another report on recreational drug use during this time period made reference to a new class of drugs, phenylethylamines, to which MDMA belonged (Holland, 2001:12).

In 1978 the first human study of MDMA was published (Holland 2001:12; Beck and Rosenbaum, 1994:15). The chemist who conducted the study, Alexander Shulgin, was largely responsible for the transformation of MDMA into what is arguably the most culturally significant drug of the last two decades. Shulgin obtained a PhD in biochemistry from the University of California and subsequently took a research chemist position at Dow Chemical. After inventing a profitable insecticide, Dow rewarded Shulgin with his own laboratory and the freedom to research whatever interested him (Saunders, 1995:12). His main interest was psychoactive drugs. Preferring to test his experiments on himself rather than animals, Shulgin experimented with various substances and documented his experiences in the large volume that he called *PiKHAL: A Chemical Love Story* (Silcott and Push, 2000:28). Functioning as ecstasy's first proselytizer, Shulgin earned nicknames ranging from the father of MDMA, to the step-father of MDMA, to the granddaddy of ecstasy (Silcott and Push, 2000:29). By 1965 the

Dow Company had become increasingly concerned about the nature of Shulgin's interests and politely asked him to depart (Joseph, 2000:22; Silcott and Push, 2000:28). Despite leaving Dow, Shulgin still possessed a drug handling licence from the DEA and continued experimenting and publishing his results in various academic journals until the early 1990's (Joseph, 2000:23).

Perhaps equally important, though less recognized, in spreading the word of MDMA was a close friend of Shulgins named Leo Zeff (or Zoff depending on the source). Zeff, a respected member of the American psychology scene, experimented with psychedelic therapy during the 1950's and 1960's and had planned to retire until introduced to MDMA (Joseph, 2000:23). Zeff was so impressed with the potential of MDMA as an adjunct to therapy that he spent the next several years introducing it to fellow therapists and patients. Zeff referred to MDMA as 'Adam' to depict "the natural state of innocence before guilt, shame and unworthiness arose" that the drug evoked (Saunders, 1995:15). Although little written documentation exists, several anecdotal accounts suggest MDMA can bring hidden emotions and thoughts to the surface, lower fears and defence mechanisms, enhance empathy and trust and facilitate more direct communication (Cohen, 1994:7; Holland, 2001:328-343; Joseph, 2000:24-27).

Some psychotherapists regarded MDMA as a valuable therapeutic tool but they were well aware of the implications for research that would follow if it became a popular street drug. They therefore agreed to keep quiet about the drug (Beck and Rosenbaum, 1994:15). Therapists tried to do as much informal research as possible without attracting public attention. Eventually, word leaked out. Until this point MDMA was not known as a "fun drug" and still remained legal in the United States. By 1984 the drug was no

longer confined to therapy and spiritual explorers and had become available on the street for recreational use under the new name ecstasy (Silcott and Push, 2000:31). It is rumoured that the name empathy was initially considered but lacked the sales appeal of the somewhat less appropriate name ecstasy (Holland, 2001:13). Not only did its name change, so did the motivations and attitudes of those supplying the drug. This change effected beliefs regarding appropriate and inappropriate ecstasy use, as well as expectations and the perceived benefits and harms associated with the drug (Beck and Rosenbaum, 1994:16). Unlike the earlier proponents, this new group stressed the euphoric and sensual properties of ecstasy (Beck and Rosenbaum, 1994:16).

The increased popularity of ecstasy in the mid-1980's attracted the attention of Texas Democratic senator Lloyd Bentsen, who urged the Drug Enforcement Agency to make the drug illegal (Holland, 2001:13). On July 24, 1984 the Drug Enforcement Agency recommended placing MDMA into Schedule 1 of the Controlled Substances Act (Beck and Rosenbaum, 1990:304).<sup>1</sup> In response to this decision, a group of psychiatrists and researchers who believed in MDMA's therapeutic potential challenged the scheduling. Together with their lawyer this group requested, and were granted, a hearing to determine what the proper categorization should be (Holland, 2001:14). On May 31, 1985, the Drug Enforcement Agency announced that it would not wait until the hearings to act and placed MDMA into Schedule 1 on an "emergency" basis (Holland, 2001:14).<sup>2</sup> MDMA is the only drug to ever have been scheduled in this manner. The hearings took

---

<sup>1</sup> A Schedule 1 substance carried the harshest penalties, and is prohibited from any application and has no recognized medical use.

<sup>2</sup> Congress gave the United States Attorney General, not the Drug Enforcement Agency, the power to schedule drugs on an emergency basis. The Attorney General was authorized to delegate this authority to the Drug Enforcement Agency, however the Drug Enforcement Agency acted before this power had been formally delegated resulting in an intriguing loophole that was used to successfully overturn several convictions (Beck and Rosenbaum, 1990:311).

place in February, June and July of 1985. Rejecting the judge's recommendation that MDMA be placed into Schedule III, which would allow for human research and therapeutic use, the Drug Enforcement Agency permanently placed MDMA into Schedule 1 on November 13, 1986 (Holland, 2001:14). As a result of the hearings, extensive media coverage began about ecstasy (Beck and Rosenbaum, 1990:305).

Ecstasy was first consumed in the United States, however, Europe soon became a major region for both production and consumption of the drug (Joseph, 2000:40; Redhead, 1993:9; Spruit, 1999:654).<sup>3</sup> A group of London vacationers discovered ecstasy during a 1987 trip to the Mediterranean island of Ibiza (Joseph, 2000:62). In beach front open air clubs, DJ's created a distinct collage of sounds and rhythms. Impressed by their discoveries, a select group tried to import the mood and sounds back to London. Large dance events, called acid parties or raves, began to be held in underground locations or clubs, with a growing number of people taking ecstasy. The rave phenomenon swept the United Kingdom and became, what some would argue, the largest youth movement in Britain's history (see Redhead, 1993).

As raves grew in size and number so did interest on the part of organized crime. Criminals muscled their way into the rave scene, extorted promoters and advertised fake parties to collect admission (McCall, 2001:39; Joseph, 2000:41; see also O'Mahoney, 1997). Raves were no longer viewed as a part of "deviant" youth culture but had come to be seen as a serious law and order issue. New laws were passed, special police units set up to abolish raves and hysterical media exposes on ecstasy-related deaths published in

---

<sup>3</sup> In 1977 Britain amended the Misuse of Drugs Act to control amphetamine-like compounds, including MDMA. This amendment put ecstasy into Class A, the category reserved for the most harmful substances.

the daily broadsheets (Redhead, 1993:13-24; Holland, 2001:157-158). Rave culture, however, did not disappear. Instead it slowly became integrated into the existing entertainment infrastructure (McCall, 2001:178-192; Weber, 1999:331-333).

In the early 1990's, after the rave/ecstasy phenomenon had become somewhat passe in Europe, raves emerged in the United States and Canada (McCall, 2001:40). The arrival of raves in North America coincided with a renewed interest in ecstasy. Four British expatriates adopted the name "Exodus" and planned the first Toronto rave involving ecstasy in 1991 (Silcott, 1999:80; 9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*). Encouraged by the success of the "rave" debut, Exodus began to arrange weekly raves and attracted crowds in the thousands. Other production groups emerged and Toronto became "one of the continent's more vibrant rave centers" (Silcott, 1999:75). As the rave scene grew, the initiators feared that it lost its clandestine nature. As early as 1993, there were complaints that "the scene has gone commercial, been bastardized and generally gotten fucked up" (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*). Growing attention was also paid to the seeming increase in ecstasy use at raves. Some participants started to deny that the events being attended were raves (15 July 1999, *Toronto Star*). Nevertheless, the size and number of events increased to the point where crowds exceeding 10,000 were not uncommon in 1999 (Weber, 1999:319; Hier, 2002:37).

Rave culture has been referred to as the largest youth movement in history and ecstasy is often referred to as the current drug of choice for today's youth. Despite the massive, global nature of this phenomenon, sociologists have only sporadically focused their research efforts on ecstasy and raves. The plethora of medical studies regarding

---

Penalties for possession are up to seven years in prison and an unlimited fine and up to life in prison and an unlimited fine for trafficking (Holland, 2001:157-158).



ecstasy vastly outnumbers sociological accounts. In Canada only a handful of sociological studies have been conducted in this area. Adlaf and Smart (1997) described the prevalence of rave attendance and the drug use profile of attendees in Ontario. Results indicated that rave attendance was not prevalent among adolescent students and that ecstasy was not the most common drug used. Weber (1999) arrived at similar conclusions in his Toronto based study. A recent study (Hier, 2002) examined Canadian anxieties concerning ecstasy use. Using a risk perspective, Hier demonstrated how moral entrepreneurs were unable to put an end to raves in the city of Toronto. By using the same discourse on risk as city officials, the rave communities were able to convince authorities that legal raves should not be outlawed as they carried less risk than the illegal “underground” variety. Covering only a four-month time period, Hier’s study did not give a complete picture of how this panic emerged or what has occurred since the summer of 2000. Also absent in this account was reference to the demonstrated harmfulness or toxicity of ecstasy.

The research project reported on in this thesis applies insights from previous constructionist studies to examine Toronto newspaper reporting on ecstasy. Through a content analysis of three newspapers (*Toronto Star*, *National Post*, *Globe and Mail*) I examine how and why ecstasy became the recent focus of anxiety in Toronto. The recent moral panic over ecstasy shares many similarities with prior drug scares but also contains some differences that provides useful insights into the role of the media in the construction of social problems. Until this point, no Canadian content analysis on ecstasy or raves had been conducted. I believe this study is interesting and timely because there seems to have been a change in rhetorical styles used by claims-makers that warrants

examination. In comparison to prior constructionist studies, the media appears more skeptical of the claims being made and is more critical in its posture. Undoubtedly, reporters read and had memories of critical commentary on the media “feeding frenzy” and journalistic “hype” in coverage of crack a decade ago. This history of journalistic excess may serve as a reflexive, cautionary tale against involvement in such claims-making activity regarding ecstasy.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### Theoretical Perspective

When studying perceived social problems, such as ecstasy use, two perspectives tend to be used: the objectivist and constructionist. The approach one uses to study a particular social problem will be greatly influenced by which theoretical perspective is adopted. According to the objectivist approach there is an objective reality to social problems (Holstein, 1993:5). What makes a social problem *a problem* is that a given condition harms or endangers human life and well being (Goode, 1990:1084).

Proponents of the objectivist view would define any condition that lowers our quality of life on a large scale as a social problem. Whether or not people are concerned, or even aware, of the condition is largely beside the point. This type of analysis minimizes, or even ignores, the subjective nature of social problems (Best, 1995:4). Dissatisfaction with the objectivist stance led to the popularization of the constructionist approach.

Constructionists argue that what makes a given condition a social problem is a collective definition of that condition as a problem (Blumer, 1971:298). Social problems do not exist objectively in the sense that a thing such as a table exists. Instead, they are constructed, called into being by the definitional process (Goode, 1990:1085). In short, what we consider social problems are social products or creations.

Proponents of constructionism are divided into two distinct camps, which Best (1995:341-345) refers to as “strict” and “contextual.” Strict constructionists favour a strong reading of the approach and argue that the social analyst should avoid making assumptions about objective reality and instead focus on claims-making (Best, 1995:341-

2). Claims-making is a form of interaction where a “demand is made by one party to another that something has to be done about some putative condition” (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977:78). The term “putative” is included because, according to Spector and Kitsuse, the alleged condition need not actually exist for claims-making to occur. All those involved in claims-making, whether consciously or not, participate in the process of constructing a problem. What is said about conditions, rather than the “objective reality” of those conditions, is the focus of constructionist research.

Strict constructionists seek to understand claims but make no attempt to verify the accuracy or merit of such claims. According to Spector and Kitsuse (1977:77), evaluating the factual basis of a claim will often require a sociologist to make authoritative statements in areas where they have no recognized competence. Researchers are simply one of many participants in the claims-making process (Best, 1995:342). Strict constructionists unwillingness to evaluate claims appears counterproductive to providing a detailed understanding of a phenomenon designated as a social problem. While obviously, a sociologist is neither trained nor expected to understand the complex language of fields such as medicine, one need not undergo years of extensive training to recognize poor research design, bad statistics and inappropriate conclusions (Best, 2001a:1). A critique (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985) of strict constructionism is that it is internally inconsistent.

The successful social problems explanation depends on making problematic the truth status of certain states of affairs selected for analysis and explanation, while backgrounding or minimizing the possibility that the same problems apply to assumptions upon which the analysis depends (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985:216).

Making certain objective phenomenon problematic while leaving others unquestioned is referred to as “ontological gerrymandering” (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985:214). Woolgar and Pawluch’s critique seems to have hardened those who followed a strict constructionist approach and resulted in a renewed push to avoid all assumptions about the empirical world (Best, 1993:135). As a result of this critique strict constructionists began to move away from case studies and focus more on introspective, theoretical projects with little practical relevance.

In contrast with strict constructionists, “contextual” constructionists, seek to locate claims-making within a particular context. Claims arise at certain times, in certain societies, by certain claims-makers, addressed to certain audiences (Best, 1995:345). According to contextual constructionists, to ignore the context in which claims emerge, as in strict constructionism, is to miss the sorts of interesting questions that make the field of social problems worth investigating. Although the process of claims-making is still the central focus of research, contextualists believe it is possible, even desirable, to evaluate the merits of claims about social conditions. The socially constructed nature of knowledge is still recognized, yet the use of statistics as facts is not prohibited provided they are carefully used as imperfect indicators. Inquiry into social conditions never becomes the focal point of analysis but can serve to enrich the study by lending insight into how the larger context has shaped the process of claims-making.

The concept of “moral panics” is conceptually linked to the social constructionist perspective and has long been associated with studies of social problems. According to Cohen (1980) a moral panic occurs when

A condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or... resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates (Cohen, 1980:9).

To describe a time of social anxiety as a “moral panic” implies the scale of the response is disproportionate to the scale of the problem. A moral panic, therefore, exists when a section of society becomes intensely concerned about a certain issue where the threat was never particularly great (Hollywood, 1997:63). During such periods of intense concern folk devils, the agents responsible for the threat, are constructed as deviant. Ultimately, attention wanes or loses its ‘public enemy status’ when focus turns to another issue or threat (Hollywood, 1997:63).

The most recent thorough review and expansion of the moral panic concept was conducted in order to identify when a moral panic has taken place (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) offer five criteria that must be satisfied: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility. Firstly, there must be a heightened level of concern over the behaviour in question. This concern can be gauged in certain measurable ways such as public opinion polls, media attention and proposed legislation. Secondly, there must be increased hostility directed toward the category of people seen engaging in this threatening behaviour. Those engaged in the wrongdoing come to be regarded as “folk devils”, deviants, outsiders, and legitimate and deserving targets of anger, hostility, and punishment (Goode&Ben-Yehuda, 1994:31). Thirdly, a

certain level of consensus must exist in society that the threat is serious. However, not all of society, nor even a majority, need to possess this sentiment. Fourthly, concern must be disproportionate to the nature of the threat. If a response was proportionate to the threat it could not be considered a panic. And fifthly, concern will arise suddenly and may become institutionalized and often disappear just as quickly. The specific issue that generated a particular panic, however, will often resurface under the guise of a new panic.

### **Literature Review**

Within sociology, the social constructionist perspective can be traced to the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966).<sup>4</sup> It was not until the 1970's, however, that researchers began to apply social constructionist theory to "social problems." In two early statements on the subject, Blumer (1971) and Spector and Kitsuse (1977) urged sociologists to focus on how and why social problems emerged and evolved. Many researchers responded and began investigating the *social construction* of social problems. Focus shifted from the objective (the social conditions people call social problems) and toward the subjective (how people thought and talked about social problems). Constructionist studies examined claims (the rhetoric used to define social problems and promote solutions for them), the claims-makers that presented those claims, and the ways the public, press, and policy-makers responded to claims-making (Best, 2001:1). The social constructionist perspective has been applied to a diverse range of topics. Theorists, however, have been mainly interested in criticizing the definitions of what constitutes a "social problem" and

---

<sup>4</sup> Although the social constructionist perspective is often traced to the work of Berger and Luckmann within sociology, its philosophical and epistemological roots have a much longer history. Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* built upon the sociology of knowledge perspective pioneered by Mannheim. Other influences include phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology.

demonstrating how knowledge is contextually determined. Even the titles of constructionist studies, such as "The Invention of Kleptomania" and "The Discovery of Child Abuse" imply that "facts" are products of human activities.

No single generalization applies to all social problems, however constructionists emphasize the role of interests, resources and legitimacy in the construction process (Gusfield 1981, Best 1990, Jenkins 1992). In his (1980) study on the "discovery of child abuse," Pfohl demonstrated that members of organizations that stand to profit from the discovery of a problem are likely to be motivated to do so. Although child abuse is as old as recorded history it was not considered a social problem until the 1960's. In a period of only four years, child abuse became regarded as a problem and legislation was passed across the entire U.S. to confront it. This "discovery" of child abuse was not prompted by an increase in abuse itself, but by factors associated with the organizational structure of the medical profession. In the 1960's pediatric radiology was viewed as a marginal specialty within organized medicine. It was a research-oriented sub-field in a profession that emphasized face-to-face interaction. "Discovering" an important medical condition provided the opportunity to establish legitimacy over a major domain of medicine and advance a marginal status. In short, in the discovery of any condition and its advocacy as a social problem we must be alert to the matter of whose interests are being advanced in the process. Locating interests does not imply that the problem being attacked is trivial, or that claims-makers do not genuinely believe in their cause. However, organizational self-interests are often at work in the construction process and should be acknowledged for a complete understanding of the definitional process.



Successful claims-making often depends, at least in part, on the resources held by various members involved in the process. Power differentials operative in a given social formation influence people's perceptions of what claims are more credible and authoritative. The media generally valorize "officialdom" and accounts from "authorities" over statements from "laypeople" (Reeves and Campbell, 1994; Pfohl, 1980). The way claims are articulated also affects whether they persuade the audience to which they are addressed (Best, 1987:102). Rhetoric, the study of persuasion, plays a central role in claims-making and is a vital element in social constructionist studies (Best, 1987). Even seemingly objective evidence should be viewed in terms of rhetoric (Gusfield, 1981). The use of official statistics and scientific results as a means of establishing fact often conceals the way values have been incorporated into claims.

Constructionist research has not been immune to criticism, even from within. Some critics reject social constructionism by saying, in effect, that people worry about social problems because they are real problems and not because somebody makes claims about them. But constructionists respond by demonstrating how concern can be aroused in the absence of any objective problem. The case of Satanism in the 1980's and 1990's is a useful illustration of pure social construction. Claims were made that Satanism was a billion-dollar industry and over one-million Satanists were linked by a highly organized, very secret network (Lippert, 1990:424). In reality there was simply no convincing evidence that a conspiracy of Satanists, carrying out bloody rituals in secluded graveyards, existed. It is, of course, impossible to prove that such a phenomenon did not exist. The Satanism menace is an example of how a social "problem can emerge, grow and become legitimated apart from conditions of objective reality" (Lippert, 1990:436).

Cases such as this make objective conditions seem irrelevant and unnecessary for those making social problems claims and highlight the utility of the constructionist approach.

The constructionist perspective has increasingly been challenged on different fronts. Poststructuralists and feminists have criticized social constructionism for lacking an adequate treatment of power and marginality. It is argued that this theory is unable to account for the fact that different ways of talking carry different degrees of authority. Constructionism is said to ignore how some claims-making styles have been privileged while others marginalized. Power limits what kinds of claims can be made and whether counterclaims and claimants are likely to emerge. Certain discourses carry such hegemonic power that they can eclipse competing accounts of reality and conceal their discourses exclusionary practices (Miller, 1993:164). Thus, power is exercised not only in the reality struggles between claims-makers, but also in sites where these struggles have been silenced (Miller, 1993:167). As Holstein (1993:246) contends, constructionism addresses only a limited range of activities that could be subsumed by the social problems process. The emphasis is almost exclusively on large scale, consciously manipulative public rhetoric.

Some critics believe that constructionism errs in believing that claims-making is a necessary process for the creation of a social problem. According to Marxists and feminists, some of the most severe social problems are those that remain invisible, ill articulated, unchallenged and outside of discourse altogether (Agger, 1993:286). Furthermore, it is argued constructionism disconnects and pathologizes social problems in ways that defy structural analysis (Agger, 1993:292). Viewing “problems” as episodic- such as child abuse, Satanism, ecstasy, means the true roots of all social

problems--capitalism, racism and sexism--remain obscured. Ignoring these underlying causes is said to blunt the potential for radical social change.

Using social constructionist theory as the general theoretical underpinning for this study means that poststructuralist, feminist and Marxist viewpoints are not explored as fully as they could have been. However, I agree with constructionists in rejecting the idea that constructionism needs to be "reconciled" with other standpoints to create a unified, comprehensive theory (Miller and Holstein, 1993:536). The distinctiveness and importance of constructionism is that it challenges, and is an alternative to, other forms of analysis. Although there are some weak points in constructionist theory, it still offers valuable insights into the world of social problems and is the most promising approach for an examination of newspaper coverage of ecstasy as a "social problem".

Anti-drug campaigns are a topic that has been a very productive area for work on the social construction of social problems. Starting with Becker's (1963) account of Harry Anslinger's entrepreneurial role in the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act and Gusfield's (1963) analysis of the symbolic politics of the Prohibition movement, numerous studies have provided insight into how the activities of claims-makers gave rise to a variety of "drug crises" over the last century. Constructionist studies have highlighted how drug prohibition often represents the restatement of threatened boundaries. Substances are often condemned, at least in part, because of their symbolic association with a particular ethnic or racial group (Jenkins, 1999:13). Striking at the substance in question is a means of stigmatizing the particular group in question. In Gusfield's (1963) book "Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement," he described the Nineteenth century temperance movement as a

means of class, status and religious warfare. At this time, White Anglo Saxon Protestants feared the erosion of their prestige and power in the face of Catholic immigration. As Catholics viewed alcohol consumption more tolerantly than did Protestants, temperance laws became a symbolic means of reasserting WASP power and values.

Interracial conflict was an important feature of Canadian drug legislation during the early 1900's (Cook, 1969:42). In the 1860's and 1870's Chinese immigrants came to British Columbia and were welcomed as a cheap source of labour (Soloman and Madison, 1977:239). The fact that the Chinese labourers smoked opium was ignored (Soloman and Madison, 1977:240). In fact, Chinese use of opium was legally recognized through an 1879 imposition of federal import duties on opium (Green, 1979:25). Tolerance towards opium smoking ended in the 1880's. At this time Chinese labourers became competitors for jobs previously held by Caucasians. Anti-Asiatic sentiment began to flourish, resulting in a head tax being imposed on Chinese immigrants (Soloman and Madison, 1977:242). The Canadian public was unsatisfied and continued to press for prohibition of all Oriental immigrants.

Inspired by occupational insecurity, a 1907 anti-Asiatic demonstration in Vancouver turned into a riot (Green, 1979:26). Deputy Minister of Labour, Mackenzie King, was sent to Vancouver to conduct an investigation and supervise the compensations to be paid to the Asians who suffered property and business losses. To King's surprise, he received two claims for compensation from Chinese opium manufacturers. Although a large number of Caucasians were dependent on opium-based pharmaceutical products, opium smoking became a symbol of the Chinese threat, or "yellow-peril" (Soloman and Madison, 1977:240). The first anti-opium law, The Opium

Act, was passed in 1908. In 1911 a more stringent Opium and Drug Act was passed, apparently largely as the result of Mackenzie King's personal moral fervour (Cook, 1969:37). Although several groups in the Canadian population could have been designated offenders, it was Chinese opium users who were targeted for enforcement measures. Stamping out opium addiction became a moral crusade and a precedent of using narcotics legislation to suppress an undesirable subculture was established.

The period from 1986 to 1992 saw the most intense drug scare of the Twentieth century. Much of the rhetoric used during this time implied there had been a sizable increase in illicit drug use in the United States. As numerous studies (Reinarman and Levine, 1995; Goode, 1990; Hartman & Golub, 1999; Orcutt & Turner, 1993) have demonstrated, quite the opposite was the case. According to drug use statistics, such as surveys conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, rates decreased or remained stable for most drugs throughout the 1980's. Moreover, the drug that the public's concern seemed to be most intensely focused, crack, had been only used or tried by a very small percentage of the American population. Despite being an infrequently used drug, crack was portrayed as a virulent disease that threatened all the central institutions in American life: families, communities, schools, police and even national sovereignty (Reinarman and Levine, 1995:154). The words "plague", "epidemic", and "crisis" became routine in reporting. Reinarman and Levine (1995) provide some explanations for the level of attention that crack received. They found that the focus on crack cocaine diverted attention away from the consequences of scaling back social programs. Crack was used as a scapegoat, the cause of many economic and urban problems, especially

among inner city and minority youth, for which the U.S. federal government's social and financial policies were largely responsible.

As research demonstrates (Ben-Yehuda, 1986; Hier, 2002; Hollywood, 1997), anti-drug rhetoric can quickly turn into a moral panic. The first reference to a "moral panic" was by Young (1971) when discussing public concern about statistics showing an apparently alarming increase in drug abuse. Although Young coined the term "moral panic", it was Cohen (1972/1980), writing about the media inspired confrontations between the Mods and Rockers, who systematically introduced this term. In this work, Cohen argued that the British youthful disturbances between 1964 and 1966 were not distinctive from previous incidents that received little media attention. The way the press handled these events, however, was characterized by exaggerated events, distortion and stereotyping. Cohen's study provides a good example of how the interaction of claims-makers, moral entrepreneurs and the mass media results in the creation of a discourse in which certain groups are demonized as a source of moral decline (Thompson, 1998:31). Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts (1978), in their analysis of a scare about muggings in Britain in the 1970's, agreed with Cohen that the media were powerful forces in shaping public opinion about controversial issues. They went on to argue that panics usually originate in statements made by members of the police. According to Hall et al (1978), the media generally did not create the news, but amplified dominant interpretations presented. As far as Hall et al (1978) were concerned, moral panics were political phenomenon. Far from being an unanticipated outcome, moral panic represented a mechanism that was actively and consciously manipulated by the ruling elite to mystify deeper crisis in the capitalist system (Hier, 2002:35).

Moral panic studies often continue to focus, like Cohen's initial work (1972/1980), on youth as this group has been the object of periodic episodes of moral panic. We have witnessed the missing children crisis (Best, 1987), the clergy sexual abuse and pedophilia crisis (Jenkins, 1992), the Israeli adolescent drug crisis (Ben-Yehuda, 1986) and the ritual abuse and the Satanism crisis (Lippert, 1990). Youth are often regarded as both at risk and a source of risk in many of these instances (Thompson, 1998:43). These youthful subcultures that form the root of many moral panics, whether they be Teddy Boys, skinheads or punks, have been predominantly working class and male.

Since Cohen's (1972/1980) and Hall's et al (1978) work, researchers have questioned some of the core assumptions of original formulations of moral panic theory. Critics, such as Waddington (1986) suggest that the statistics used by Hall (1978) actually suggest an *increase* in crime in the context studied. Waddington concluded that moral panic as a concept lacked any criteria of proportionality to determine whether concern is justified. Defenders of the concept specified indicators of disproportionality, such as exaggeration or fabrication of statistics, singling out a particular issue as exceptionally threatening when it is not, and suggesting that conditions at one point in time pose a severe threat when they are no worse than at other times (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994:43-5). Another weakness in classical moral panic theory is that it treats concepts like "society" and "societal reaction" as monolithic and overlooks the plurality of reactions and counter-discourses that circulate (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995). Over the years folk devils have become empowered in ways not envisioned by Cohen or Hall.

Folk devils now find themselves sometimes supported in the same mass media that criticizes them and have been able to create their own niche media.

After reviewing the relevant constructionist and moral panic literature, especially with respect to anti-drug campaigns, several common themes can be observed. First, drug scares are usually initiated by state agents (i.e. police or politicians) or those with a moral, organizational or political stake in the issue. A second commonality running through these anti-drug campaigns is the use of the media to pass legitimating messages to the public (and in many cases serving to sensationalize and magnify themes). A third theme underlying the anti-drug campaigns is institutional racism. A fourth theme involved in anti-drug campaigns is scapegoating drugs as the causes of other public problems. Claims-makers often link drugs to other societal issues, such as crime, in an attempt to blame the substance use for these problems.

Moral panics over drugs often look back to a golden age where strong moral discipline acted as a deterrent to delinquency (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995:561). However, looking back a few years will generally reveal the same process in operation. Anxieties over drugs appear with striking regularity, and they usually follow very similar patterns. With so many precedents at hand ecstasy is not unique. Similar assertions have been made in the past and undoubtedly will be heard in the future. The importance of examining the constructed nature of claims made about ecstasy is to reveal their reoccurring nature and encourage newspaper readers to apply a critical approach to future accounts.

In this project I examine the nature of newspaper coverage about ecstasy in Toronto. To address this topic I use a social constructionist perspective. According to



this perspective claims-makers play a significant role in defining a phenomenon as a “problem.” This definitional process is accomplished by associating the phenomenon with threatening imagery. Certain threatening imagery regarding ecstasy is almost identical to previous panics. Other imagery is somewhat unique. The primary difference is the segment of society with which ecstasy is associated: white, suburban, middle-class. Newspapers could not conjure images of racial or class others, as they did around opium and crack, to incite the public. However, it is ecstasy’s position within the status quo that fueled the moral panic. The potentially problematic “white drug” image of ecstasy became the focal point of the moral panic (Linder, 2001). Also, there seemed to be newfound reluctance among some journalists to become involved in claims-making. Perhaps more than in the past, journalists pointed out the constructed nature of claims being made by reporters, politicians, police, etc.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

Illustrating the process by which ecstasy became defined as a “problem” required a three-step procedure. First, the reporting patterns of three major Toronto newspapers regarding ecstasy is assessed. This initial stage of analysis is descriptive in nature and involves an examination of the amount of coverage given to ecstasy. Second, key claims-makers are identified to reveal who is fueling commentary on this topic. Third, a content analysis of the selected newspaper articles is done to illustrate the context of media coverage and what themes are being highlighted by claims-makers in the construction process.

Content analysis involves examining artifacts of social communication (Berg, 1998:223). Usually these are written documents but speeches, films, musical lyrics, photographs and anything else written, visual or spoken that serves as a medium for communication can be included (Neuman, 1997:273). The strengths of content analysis as a methodology are numerous. It is useful for projects with a large amount of text. Information can be reduced to numbers to reveal aspects of a text that are difficult to see with casual observation (Neuman, 1997:274). Precise, repeatable results are produced. It is a nonobtrusive, nonreactive measurement technique, allowing a topic to be studied “at a distance” (Neuman, 1997:274). A researcher can form conclusions from content evidence without having to gain access to communicators who may be unwilling or unable to be examined directly (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998:30). In addition, this method makes longitudinal studies possible long after events described in the communication through the use of archived material (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998:31).

Application of content analysis, or any research method, can be viewed as consisting of three stages: conceptualization of the phenomenon, research design, and data collection and analysis (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998:33). At the conceptualization stage the goal is to address the question of the purpose of the study. The purpose of this research is to describe how three major daily newspapers in Toronto constructed ecstasy as a "problem" and explore whether this construction has changed over time. During the research design stage, the researcher addresses questions of the study's sources of content, time frame, unit of analysis, sampling procedures, and what content analysis categories or variables will be included. For this project, the content of three newspapers is examined: *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail* and *the National Post*. These sources are chosen because they are Toronto based, although the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post* are distributed nationally. Of equal importance, from a practical standpoint, all are available in the microfilm collection at the University of Windsor library.<sup>5</sup>

### **Data sources**

To find relevant articles in these newspapers, electronic database indices were used (*Canadian Business and Current Affairs* and *The Canadian Newsdisc*). Using these indices has the advantage of locating all stories related to a particular subject. A similar search, to double check results, was done through the *Toronto Star* web site. No such archival records are available to double-check the *Globe and Mail* or *National Post*. The

---

<sup>5</sup> Initially I had hoped to include the *Toronto Sun* in this analysis. The *Sun*'s tendency toward sensationalist coverage would have been a boon to my research. However, the *Sun* proved virtually impossible to locate unless one was willing to pay the exorbitant price demanded by *Sun* chain owner Canoe. Unwilling to meet their ransom demands, the *Sun* was excluded from analysis.

keywords “ecstasy”, “MDMA” (short for methylenedioxymethamphetamine, the chemical commonly known as ecstasy), and “rave” (and various versions thereof) were used. No time frame needed to be imposed because no coverage occurred before 1989. Arrest reports in which ecstasy was not the main focus were excluded. Several other unrelated articles, typically referring to ecstasy in the religious sense or “rave” reviews about a performance or movie, were also eliminated. After eliminating articles irrelevant to the topic under investigation a total of 183 news stories were included in the data set. The *Toronto Star*, with a total of 80 articles, devoted the most coverage to ecstasy. The *National Post* ran 65 articles and the *Globe and Mail* 38. Measured by the number of lines in each article, these 183 news stories accounted for 21,733 lines of print, with an average of 119 lines per article. The number of articles covering the topic of ecstasy is presented in Table 1. The amount of lines of print devoted to ecstasy is provided in Table 2. It would be misleading to imply these articles represent the whole range of claims-making activities regarding ecstasy and raves. The inclusion of other media forms, such as sub-cultural magazines or television news reports would have enriched this project. These media would likely rely on different claims-makers than newspapers and provide a unique slant to issues and events involving ecstasy. Accessibility of these sources is a problem and therefore analysis is limited to Toronto newspapers. The construction of ecstasy in sub-cultural magazines, television, etc. may, or may not, coincide with that of the selected newspapers. This limitation can be addressed in a future study.

**Table 1: Coverage of ecstasy/raves in three Toronto newspapers**

<b>Year</b>	<b>TS</b>	<b>GM</b>	<b>NP</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of Articles</b>
1989	1	-	-	1	.5
1990	-	1	-	1	.5
1991	-	-	-	-	-
1992	1	-	-	1	.5
1993	1	2	-	3	1.5
1994	-	-	-	-	-
1995	-	-	-	-	-
1996	1	1	-	2	1
1997	7	-	-	7	4
1998	3	-	1	4	4.5
1999	9	4	12	25	12
2000	43	28	45	117	64
2001	11	2	4	17	9
2002	3	-	1	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2: Number of lines of print devoted to ecstasy/rave articles**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Lines of print</i>
1989	112
1990	58
1991	0
1992	113
1993	627
1994	0
1995	0
1996	167
1997	733
1998	800
1999	3962
2000	13096
2001	1626
2002	439
<b>Total</b>	<b>21733</b>

### **Qualitative/quantitative content analysis**

As a research technique there has been debate among users of content analysis about whether the focus should be quantitative or qualitative in nature. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses. Quantitative content analysis allows a researcher to reduce large sets of data to precise, manageable form, and to describe the variation in data with summary statistics such as percentages and averages (Riffe, Lacey & Fico, 1998:26). It has been argued (Holsti, 1969) that a strict reliance on quantitative methods may emphasize “precision at the cost of problem significance” (10). Problems may be selected for research simply because they are easily quantifiable. Although this criticism seems misdirected, as trivial research is more a reflection of the researcher than the method, certain content may lose meaning if reduced to numeric form. Sometimes the presence, or absence, of even a single particular symbol may be crucial to a message’s impact (Holsti, 1969:10). With this in mind I follow Holsti’s (1969) advice and use both quantitative and qualitative methods to “supplement each other” (11).

### **Measurement**

In a content analysis project there are four characteristics of text content that can be measured: frequency, direction, intensity and space (Neuman, 1997:275). Measuring frequency simply means counting whether or not something is present in the text and, if so, how often. For example, because of ecstasy’s reputation as a dance drug I wanted to know whether any articles mentioned ecstasy in the absence of raves. Twenty articles did. Frequency can often be a useful measure, however, two assumptions need to be acknowledged. The first is that the frequency in which a concept appears is a valid indicator of concern, attention, value and so on (Holsti, 1969:122). The second is that

each unit of content should be given equal weight (Holsti, 1969:122). These assumptions make it essential that qualitative data be used to support any argument arising out of frequency counts. The direction of messages in content can also be measured. I developed a list of ways in which ravers are portrayed ranging from positive (e.g. friendly, non-judgmental) to negative (lazy, irresponsible) to determine which depiction is more prominent. Intensity, or strength, of a message can also be calculated. In the preceding example the characteristics attributed could have been evaluated as minor or major and rated along a scale for intensity. The reliability of measuring content on a continuum, however, is very difficult and requires a profound knowledge of language that I do not possess. For this reason I measured intensity by qualitative inference rather than numerically.

### **Coding**

When coding data a researcher can perform manifest coding and/or latent coding. Coding the visible, surface content in the text is known as manifest coding (Neuman, 1997:275). For example, the researcher counts the number of times a phrase or word (eg. rave) appears or the percentage of articles that contain the word or phrase. Manifest coding is very reliable because the word is either present or not. Certain words (eg. rave and ecstasy) have multiple meanings and manifest coding does not take these into account. Latent coding involves looking for the underlying, implicit meaning in the content of the text (Neuman, 1997:276). General rules in the coding system help the researcher determine whether particular themes are present. Latent coding is less reliable as it depends on the coder's knowledge of language and social meaning. The validity of

latent coding, however, can exceed that of manifest coding. Meaning is often communicated in implicit ways that depend on context and not just specific words.

For my research a combination of coding methods is used. Descriptive statistics, such as proportion and frequency distributions, based on manifest coding of key words are calculated. For the latent coding section I examine the themes that are present such as who the dominant claims-maker(s) are, if other drugs are associated with ecstasy, etc. After a preliminary reading of the articles a protocol of categories to be examined was created. These categories changed as the protocol was put to use. The abstract nature of some themes required operationalization, meaning that the actual, measured variables to be found in the text were specified. For example, to examine how much importance the newspapers placed on ecstasy issues, the abstract concept of importance is operationalized by placement of article (front page denoting importance), article size, presence of photographs, etc.

### **Units of analysis**

In addition to identifying and defining the categories into which data will be classified, the units of analysis must also be designated. A unit is a discretely defined element of content based on a definable boundary or symbolic meaning (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998:58). The units of analysis can be a word, sentence, paragraph, image, article or any other content element with a definable physical or temporal boundary (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998:59). Two types of units are relevant to content analysis: content units and study units. Elements specifically related to the meaning and production of content are known as content units (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998:59). Content units represent elements defined independently of the study, usually by the creator of the content. Study units



concern the actual process of measurement and are defined by the researcher conducting the content analysis. Study units include sampling, recording and context units.

Sampling units are the physical units selected for study from the entire content of interest.

Recording units (also known as coding units) are the specific segment of content that will be classified in the coding process (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998:59). Seven different

elements can be used as the recording unit: words, themes, characters, sentences or

paragraphs, items, concepts and semantics (Berg, 1998:231-232). Sometimes it may not

be possible to classify a recording unit without referring to the context in which it appears

(Holsti, 1969:117). Context units are the content elements that are examined in order to

appropriately assign content to recording units. A search through the sentence, paragraph

or entire document may be needed to determine which coding category is appropriate.

The context unit is the largest body of content that will be searched to characterize a

recording unit (Holsti, 1969:118). A context unit can be the same as or larger than the

recording unit, but it cannot be smaller (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998:61).

After the study units have been determined, a system for assigning numbers to the units must be developed. Content can be assigned numbers that represent one of four

levels of measurement: nominal, ordinal, interval, or ratio (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998:70).

Nominal measures are simply a method of labeling items. The numbers used for each

category are arbitrary and carry no meaning other than being convenient labels to

distinguish the concepts from one another (Howell, 1995:15). Ordinal scales order

objects or concepts along some continuum however no information is given about the

difference between points on the scale (Howell, 1995:16). Likewise, an interval scale

orders concepts along a continuum but also indicates differences between points (Howell,

1995:16). A ratio scale has the properties of the preceding scales but also a true zero point, thus allowing one to speak of ratios (Howell, 1995:17).

### **Data analysis**

The next stage following conceptualization and research design, data analysis, involves applying the formulated rules and actually coding the data. According to Strauss (1987), a researcher will use three different kinds of coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding, or unrestricted coding, is performed the first time a researcher reads through the collected material. The document will be read line by line to determine the concepts and categories that fit the data. Critical terms, key events and themes will be located and assigned initial codes in a preliminary attempt to condense the data into categories (Neuman, 1997:422). At this stage it is important to hold interpretations, questions and answers as tentative at best (Berg, 1998:236). Making connections among themes or elaborating the concepts is not yet a concern. It is essential to write analytic memos early in data collection and continue until just before the final report is completed. Often these memos form the basis for analyzing data in the final report. Strauss suggests the data be analyzed minutely until the coding categories become repetitious. At this point it is usually safe to conclude that it is time to move on. In axial coding the researcher focuses on the initial coded themes and intensively codes around specific categories (Neuman, 1997:423). New codes may emerge but the main concern is to review the already established codes and start organizing ideas or themes in a coherent and meaningful way. Axial coding encourages thinking about causes, consequences and linkages between concepts. It may be decided that certain concepts should be dropped and others focused on more. Selective coding occurs after most or all

of the data collection is complete and major themes identified. At this stage major themes guide the research. Themes identified in earlier coding are reorganized and more than one major theme is elaborated. Researchers scan data and previous codes looking for cases that best illustrate themes.

### **Reliability**

Reliability in content analysis, or any research method is crucial. Measurement of concepts must be consistent over time, place and circumstance. Three types of reliability are pertinent to content analysis: stability, reproducibility and accuracy (Weber, 1976:16). Stability refers to the extent to which the results of classification are invariant over time. This type of reliability can be assessed by having content coded more than one time. Inconsistency is a sign of unreliability and may be due to ambiguities in the coding rules or text, cognitive changes in the coder or simple errors (Weber, 1976:17). Reproducibility, or inter-coder reliability, refers to the degree of consistency across coders (Neuman, 1997:277). Differences across coders may be due to poorly articulated categories, cultural understanding and lack of training or time. Possible remedies to low inter-coder reliability include reviewing the coding procedures, retraining coders or dropping unreliable categories. Accuracy refers to the extent to which the classification of text corresponds to a standard or norm (Weber, 1976:17). Except for training purposes, standard codings are usually not available for texts and therefore accuracy is seldom used as a reliability test.

Testing the stability of coding was the only possible reliability check for this research project. Periodically a previously coded article was re-coded. If reliability problems arose, as they did a few times, the categories were adjusted and the process was

started over. An important issue surrounding this study is that it was undertaken by a single researcher, leaving it open to the possibility of subjective interpretation. A single coder may not notice the dimensions of a concept being missed, or how a protocol that is perfectly clear to him/herself may be opaque to another (Riffe, Lacy&Fico, 1998:120).

The use of several researchers is more likely to produce conceptual and operational definitions that are clearer and more explicit. This issue is particularly pertinent in the qualitative classification of categories that require judgment on the part of the coder. As with any qualitative form of analysis, this design is open to the positivist criticism that it is too subjective and may differ significantly if the coding was undertaken by a researcher of differing class, gender, ethnicity or age.<sup>6</sup>

### **Validity**

Validity is another central issue in research. Validity is usually defined as the extent to which an instrument is measuring what it is intended to (Holsti, 1969:142). To say that a category or variable is valid is to assert that there is correspondence between the category and the abstract concept that it represents. Measurement reliability is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for validity. A coding scheme may be reliable in its application but it may not be measuring what researchers assume it is measuring. To establish a measure's truthfulness in capturing a concept, several "tests" of validity have been devised. The most common, and minimum required, is content or face validity. Basically, the researcher asks if the measurement of the concept makes sense "on its face" (Riffe, Lacy&Fico, 1998:142). If the purpose of research is descriptive, content validity is normally sufficient (Holsti, 1969:143). Other tests of validity include:

---

<sup>6</sup> It is acknowledged that the research design of this thesis may be subject to bias due to my demographic variables. Being a 26 year old white, middle class male may have influenced my interpretation of this

predictive validity, concurrent validity and construction validity. Predictive validity is a test that correlates a measure with some predicted outcome (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998: 143). If the instrument predicts events as expected, the reliability of the measure is established. Concurrent validity is established when the measure used in one study is correlated with a measure used in another study (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998: 143).

Construct validity involves relating the measure to the theoretical context from which it is taken and explaining why it has the properties it does. For this study validation came from a test of face validity and a review process.

### **Ethical implications**

A researcher must always consider the ethical implications of their work.

Informed consent, privacy and confidentiality had little relevance in this design as items were drawn from public statements made in, and for, the mass media. The only parties that may be affected by this research are those already on the public record. While the use of content analysis as a methodology removed many ethical concerns, there remain a small number to be addressed. The issue of partisanship should be mentioned. Social constructionist case studies tend to support the “underdog” and have a clear, if often implicit, political bias. According to Becker (1967), the researcher’s position should be made explicit. Accordingly, I will make my feelings known. I have never taken ecstasy and do not identify myself as a raver. I must, however, acknowledge that I feel a certain degree of sympathy towards this youth movement and those who have been demonized for taking ecstasy. I do not believe that holding such an opinion invalidates my research, however, special effort needs to be made to present findings truthfully and accurately.

---

topic. However, hiring a research assistant was not feasible.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TOPICS OF COVERAGE

This chapter presents the research findings from a content analysis of the “ecstasy problem.” In this chapter the media coverage of ecstasy is traced and the core claims summarized. The primary data on which these claims are based is evaluated to illustrate that a gap exists between the “objective” evidence and the claims of specific individuals. Chapter five examines the key claims-makers involved in the construction of ecstasy as a social problem. Drawing on the insights of the material reviewed, in chapter six I argue that the ecstasy panic is not based on “objective evidence” and offer an explanation as to the reasons it occurred.

#### **Location of articles**

For all articles, a count was made of the page number where ecstasy-related stories are featured. Only three percent of the ecstasy-related news (N=5) is found on the cover page of the newspapers. The author of the first article to make front-page news, “They only come out at night” (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*), appears curious, but not critical, about ecstasy and rave culture. Four following front-page stories are not so kind. “Agonizing over Ecstasy” (2 November 1999, *Toronto Star*) is replete with warnings that ecstasy has become mainstream and is causing death among Toronto’s youth. Three further articles warn of brain damage, drug laboratories sprouting up across Canada endangering unsuspecting neighbours, and the death of a twenty-one year-old mother. Seven percent of articles (N=13) are found on the front page of secondary sections, mainly the Greater Toronto section in the *Toronto Star*. With the exception of “Danger Parties” (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*), a full page article claiming that “teens

are risking their lives at mass raves,” the cover articles of secondary sections generally give a favourable impression of the rave scene and seldom focus on ecstasy. Cover page articles are also found in the Fashion and Entertainment sections. Others are scattered throughout various sections. However, primarily articles are buried in the last pages of section A or throughout section B. This placement of articles suggests that, except on rare occasions, journalists (and/or possibly editors) did not consider ecstasy a significant enough issue to warrant prominent coverage.

### **Visual Imagery**

An important way that these Toronto based newspapers (*Toronto Star*, *National Post*, *Globe and Mail*) illuminated the stories of ecstasy is by the visual images they printed. In total, forty-eight articles (26%) are accompanied by one, or more photographs. Images that appear twice or more are presented in Table 3. Analysis of relevant photographs reinforce the ambivalent attitude newspapers have towards ecstasy and raves. The visual imagery often is not an accurate reflection of the written content. Stories with an anti-rave/ecstasy slant are often accompanied by pictures suggesting a fun, care-free atmosphere at these events. One typical example, “Danger Parties” (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*), informs parents that “teenagers are risking their lives at mass ‘raves’ where dangerous drugs are sold, and fire and safety codes violated” but carries images of ravers smiling gleefully. There appears a reluctance to discuss ecstasy without reference to raves, even when raving is not the focus of an article. For example, although the article “Ecstasy use growing among adults, seniors” (15 August 2000, *National Post*), examines ecstasy use among middle aged individuals and has nothing to do with raving, a photo showing a group of young ravers is included.

**Table 3: Photograph images in newspapers**

<i>Image</i>	<i>TS</i>	<i>GM</i>	<i>NP</i>	<i>Combined</i>
Ravers	19	4	12	35
Allan Ho	7	2	-	9
Drug imagery	5	2	-	7
Police seizures	1	3	-	4
Rave flyers	2	-	-	2
Exterior of rave club	2	-	-	2

Pictures of ecstasy pills are visible in seven articles and frequently the harmless appearance of the drug is played upon. "Agonizing over Ecstasy" (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*) shows cute looking pills with hearts, dollar signs and the word "love" imprinted on them while the text tells how the pills are regarded as "benign as a Flintstone vitamin." Another article, "The High Life" (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*), provides a comical touch to the issue and dresses an ecstasy pill up in a tie and top hat. These whimsical images contrast with photographs of grim faced police posing with seized pills and frowning in front of drug laboratories

#### **Location of events and issues**

Table 4 presents the frequency distribution for the location of the events and issues mentioned in articles. One hundred and twenty four of the news articles have ecstasy-related stories that pertain to the city of Toronto (68%). Only sixteen of the articles (9%) make reference to provincial news, however, even when such a reference is made the emphasis is still on the city of Toronto. The national category refers to articles that are Canada-wide in scope. International refers to other countries and Canada, and foreign refers to articles dealing only with other countries.



**Table 4: Frequency Distribution for location of events and issues**

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Local (Toronto)	124	68
Provincial	16	9
National	6	3
International	10	5
Foreign	6	3
Not available/Unidentifiable	15	8
Total	183	

Considering that the *National Post* and *Globe and Mail* are distributed nationally, it is interesting that few articles make reference to issues and/or events outside of Toronto. If the Toronto and Provincial categories are collapsed, seventy-seven percent of the articles provide isolated information. That is they deal with only Ontario's, and more specifically Toronto's, "ecstasy problem", and not the national or international "ecstasy problem." By portraying this nativist orientation, readers might receive the message that Toronto is either alone in having an "ecstasy problem" or that there is no national or provincial connection. While it is true that Toronto possesses a large rave scene in which ecstasy is sometimes used it is by no means the only area in the world, let alone Canada, to have this experience. In fact, according to Smith (2000a), British Columbia has a more extensive "ecstasy problem" than Toronto. Providing information about the "ecstasy problem" in other areas and solutions devised would help dispel the illusion that Toronto is facing a unique situation.

#### **Extent of coverage**

Ecstasy did not become a prominent issue in the three newspapers (*Toronto Star*, *National Post*, *Globe and Mail*) until 2000. In fact, reporting on ecstasy is sporadic for the *Toronto Star* and *National Post* prior to this time and virtually nonexistent in the

*Globe and Mail*. Ecstasy is discussed in many early articles, but frequently its connection to the rave scene is downplayed. For example, the *Globe and Mail* (9 October 1993) reported that many kids came to raves and did not do drugs. Similarly, the *Toronto Star* informed readers that research failed to demonstrate a higher rate of drug taking associated with raves in comparison to other youth recreational activities (7 April 1997). Articles featured topics such as rave fashion, flyers, and music and occasionally incorporated views of ravers. One report (14 July 1998, *Toronto Star*) even presents a “guide to rave etiquette” that informs people to bring their friends and rave paraphernalia like glow sticks and lollipops, wear something cool and to be prepared to dance all night. The guide to etiquette also tells people to leave their parents at home and not to fight because violence is not tolerated. In general ravers are portrayed as innocent, optimistic, and perhaps naïve, kids simply looking to have a good time to forget about their problems (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*; 19 June 1999, *National Post*).

In February 2000, ecstasy began to appear with some regularity in Toronto newspapers. Innocence and naiveté in media coverage were soon replaced by violence, excessive drug use and danger. In late April and early May several notable events, such as the police chief extending an invitation to Prime Minister Jean Chretien to attend a rave (7 May 2000, *Toronto Star*) and the Mayor calling for a ban on city-sanctioned raves (4 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*), attracted considerable attention. Articles began to focus on the negative effects of ecstasy and the potential dangers of raves (15 March 2000, *National Post*; 10 May 2000, *Toronto Star*). Press attention culminated during the inquest into the death of Allan Ho (May 8-25 2000), throughout which ecstasy and raves

were the focus of thirty-eight articles.<sup>7</sup> At this time commentary came almost exclusively from experts and official sources, without much input from those involved in the rave scene. For the next few months raves remained a hot topic while Toronto City Council debated whether they should be held on city property. After August 3<sup>rd</sup>, when a council vote allowed raves to resume in city owned facilities, the topic of raves became passé and newspaper coverage infrequent.

### **Portrayal of ecstasy**

Within the newspaper articles analyzed ecstasy is portrayed in two, almost polar opposite manners. The majority of articles cautioned about the dangers of ecstasy use. According to police and other “official” sources, ecstasy is a dangerous, unpredictable, impure substance invading the streets of Toronto.<sup>8</sup> Ecstasy was described in articles as “insidious” (28 September 1999, *National Post*) and a “garbage drug (2 February 2000, *Toronto Star*).” It was also claimed that demand for ecstasy had reached such a high level that manufacturers could not keep pace (2 February 2000, *Toronto Star*). Not only was ecstasy attacked, but by implication so were raves. Raves provided a physical space, much like the opium den in the early 1900’s and the crack house in the 1980’s, to condemn ecstasy use.

In some instances, ecstasy is described as an extremely pleasurable, even spiritual experience. Some users even described their first trip as life changing (19 June 1999, *National Post*). News articles portraying ecstasy as “a good clean drug” (25 March 2000,

---

<sup>7</sup> Allan Ho was a 20 year old Ryerson Polytechnic University student who died after taking ecstasy at an underground rave in Toronto. In May 2000 the Ontario Coroner’s Office conducted an inquest into the circumstances surrounding his death and other, less publicized deaths. Broader concerns about raves, such as how the parties are advertised, licensing requirements and emergency resources were also discussed. For more information about Allan Ho and the inquest into his death see pages 65-70.

<sup>8</sup> Topics such as fear of adulteration of ecstasy pills and extent of use are discussed later in this chapter.

*Globe and Mail*) and “healthy hedonism” (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*) read almost like paid advertisements. Ecstasy is described as “an appreciation of the mind, the body and the stimulations of nature” (19 June 1999, *National Post*) and said to “create a bodily sensation that makes touching a euphoric experience” (19 June 1999, *National Post*). Users claim it “makes you really want it, mentally” (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*) and that people often “take it around midnight, dance for four or five hours, then have sex” (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). Not only do ecstasy users report becoming “open, loving and alert” (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*) but they say ecstasy also “leads to the best sex you’ve ever had in your life” (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Ecstasy is thought to be “the ultimate foreplay under the spectre of aids” (19 June 1999, *National Post*) for the younger crowd and something that will “put a little spark back into dinner parties and sex lives” (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*) of older users. According to a *Toronto Star* article, ecstasy acted as a subtle aphrodisiac and could actually turn you into a better lover (17 July 1993, *Toronto Star*). One user went as far as to claim ecstasy could make you perform like a porn star (7 February 1998, *Toronto Star*). Even the ecstasy high is often described in sexual terms such as “an eight hour orgasmic high of extreme body and mind heightening awareness” (7 February 1998, *Toronto Star*).<sup>9</sup>

### **Ecstasy is not a drug**

Claims were made by police, politicians, and journalists that society in general, and particularly the youth of Toronto, did not view ecstasy as dangerous. In fact these claims-makers would have us believe that many people did not even consider ecstasy a

---

<sup>9</sup> Although the newspapers portrayed ecstasy as an aphrodisiac, the drug tends to impair sexual function in men. Only two articles acknowledged this fact (22 May 2000, *Toronto Star*; 20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). They, however, also claimed ravers were starting to use Viagra to counteract this effect (22 May 2000, *Toronto Star*).

drug. This perceived lax attitude seemed to be a greater threat to claims-makers than ecstasy itself. Underlying the attack on ecstasy appears to be fear of a change in societal views regarding drugs in general. Ecstasy is believed to defy conventional stereotypes of a “drug problem” and seems to herald a new generation of drugs and drug users. Even experienced officers, such as 30-year RCMP veteran Bill Matheson, appear worried because ecstasy is “surrounded by so much positive hype and because its target market seemed so young” (27 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). According to Detective Randy Smith, when officers go to schools to warn of ecstasy they see smiles on the students’ faces. “These kids are laughing at us for being concerned about this”, said the seemingly distraught officer (2 February 2000, *Toronto Star*).

One possible reason for curiosity about ecstasy is said to be its’ name, which makes it appear intriguing in a way many drugs are not. Ecstasy sounds like a pleasant, peaceful, even sexual drug. As Detective Rick Chase notes “everybody likes a nice, warm, fuzzy, huggy-type name” (2 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). The name ecstasy is “on the opposite end of the drug spectrum from the scary names like speed, acid, heroin. It’s got a name that’s not crack. It’s ecstasy. All of that makes it seem very harmless” (2 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). Admittedly, drugs such as speed have been popular despite their names but one is left to wonder whether the same level of attention would be directed towards ecstasy if it were referred to differently.

It is impossible to prove whether or not MDMA is popularized because of its nickname ecstasy. However, it is conceivable that the drug is alluring to many users and to journalists for this reason. The name ecstasy must be a God-send for unimaginative reporters who can easily manipulate it to produce attention grabbing headlines such as

“Agonizing over Ecstasy” (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*) or “Police ecstatic at capture of sloppy pill smugglers” (18 May 2000, *National Post*). Not only are such permutations of the name ecstasy dreadfully repetitive but oftentimes they were recycled from foreign newspaper articles.

Of the one hundred and eighty-three articles examined for this study that dealt with the rave/ecstasy phenomenon, one hundred and fifty seven (86%) refer specifically to ecstasy. All one hundred and fifty seven articles make use of the name “ecstasy,” while only forty-eight of these identify MDMA as the actual name for the drug. The *Globe and Mail* appears particularly oblivious to its reliance on the nickname, running only four out of thirty eight articles with reference to the name MDMA. Not only do few articles in the *Toronto Star*, *National Post* or *Globe and Mail* list the scientific name, none rely exclusively on the identifier MDMA. Only four articles (9 December 1997, *Toronto Star*; 24 August 2001, *Toronto Star*; 9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*; 6 December 1999, *National Post*) use MDMA more frequently than ecstasy. In total, “ecstasy” is mentioned six times more frequently than MDMA (718 instances compared to 121). Reliance on the name “ecstasy” instead of the more technical and less enjoyable sounding “MDMA” is perhaps one reason for the slight increase in ecstasy consumption during the late 1990’s. Table 5 illustrates how the newspapers identified the drug.

**Table 5: Identification of the drug**

	<i>TS</i>	<i>GM</i>	<i>NP</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number of articles referring to ecstasy	71	31	55	157
Number of times “ecstasy” mentioned	333	165	220	718
Average per article	4.2	4.3	3.4	3.9
Number of articles referring to MDMA	29	4	15	48
Number of times “MDMA” mentioned	76	16	29	121
Average per article	.95	.42	.45	.66

### **Adulteration**

Fake and adulterated pills being passed off as ecstasy, rather than ecstasy itself, appears to account for the greatest concern among claims-makers. In its pure form, ecstasy is not sufficiently dangerous to warrant the attention received. At best, studies reporting harm are inconclusive and the number of deaths remains low considering the extent of use (Concar and Ainsworth, 2002; Croft, Macay, Mills and Gruzelier, 2001; Gouzoulis-Mayfrank, Daumann, Tuchtenhager, Pelz, Becker, Kunert, Fimm and Sass, 2000; Kish, Furukawa, Ang, Varce and Kalasinsky, 2000). To counter this impasse and bolster their warnings, claims-makers frequently cite the possibility of other, scarier, substances being present in ecstasy pills (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*; 2 September 1999, *National Post*; 18 May 2000 *National Post*; 10 July 2001, *Toronto Star*). For example, an advice column in the *Toronto Star* warned readers “some ecstasy is cut with industrial cleaners” (9 December 1997). Claiming that ecstasy is cut with harder, more deadly, drugs such as crack, synthetic heroin, PCP and crystal methamphetamine was likely an effective way to stir up fear.

Based on the newspaper articles analyzed, it seems preying upon the fear of the unknown was a strategy in the fight against ecstasy. To maximize the effectiveness of this ploy, claims-makers often suggested that adulteration of ecstasy pills is a recent phenomenon. Such claims helped challenge any belief that ecstasy is harmless. According to claims-makers, past experiences with the drug, either personally or by association, could not be trusted as a method of gauging harm. Newspaper analysis

reveals that this tactic, of warning about increased adulteration, occurs since the earliest stages of coverage. As far back as ecstasy appears in the papers examined, decreasing pill quality is used as a justification to condemn ecstasy. In 1993 the *Globe and Mail* warned that the “dwindling supply of MDMA’s ingredients have prompted basement chemists to produce bastardized versions of the drug” (9 October). It is claimed that amphetamine laced pills and powders had appeared on the rave scene masquerading as ecstasy. Bruce Eisner, the author of the book “Ecstasy: The MDMA Story”, stated “It’s a real crap-shoot whether people are going to get the real stuff or not” (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*). Over time more nefarious adulterants were cited to instill fear in users. In 1997, police claimed that “a lot of it is PCP or other dangerous drugs. People selling these drugs are unscrupulous” (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*). Not only is it claimed that the substances used to cut the pills became more potent, but more than likely the pills are not even ecstasy to begin with. According to Metro police Detective Ian Briggs, “90% of the drugs sold as ecstasy are not really ecstasy” (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*).

By 1999 claims-makers increasingly stressed the dangers of adulteration, but did not acknowledge that this fear is as old as the use of ecstasy in Toronto. Police felt “the biggest concern in the club scene *right now* is ecstasy being laced with other substances” (2 September 1999, *National Post*). The rave scene is depicted as revolving “more around adulterated drugs” than in the past (22 December 1999, *National Post*). Police believe a major shift had occurred and that the quality control is not what it used to be (2 September 1999, *National Post*). Analysis of seized ecstasy in police labs is said to show pills laced with “substances including harder drugs, PCP and even Drano” (2 September 1999, *National Post*). Several quotes from ravers are used to validate these concerns.



According to one self identified raver, “the scene is dirty now. The drugs used to be a lot cleaner. Ecstasy used to be just MDMA. Now ecstasy is cut with synthetic heroin, crystal and PCP. The worst of the lot is PCP” (23 February 1999, *Toronto Star*).

Another raver, Princess, stated “If you’re doing pure MDMA it’s completely different than doing whatever is in most of the pills being passed off as ecstasy” (11 December 2001, *Toronto Star*). Princess went on to add that she took a pill that wasn’t ecstasy once and vomited for eight hours. Constable Rob Cullen summed up the experience of consuming adulterated pills, stating, “The buyers were looking for six hours of happiness. They got six hours of hell” (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). Other warnings include “many pills or capsules sold as ecstasy are chemical cocktails containing anything from crystal meth and synthetic heroin to bleach” (23 February 1999, *Toronto Star*), and “more unusual substances, including household cleaners and strychnine are being found” (8 May 2000, *National Post*).

It is arguable whether substances such as cocaine and heroin have been used as adulterants in ecstasy. First, it makes no economic sense. Ecstasy is a very cheap drug to produce. “The drug costs pennies to make and can sell for \$25 to \$35 a pill” (8 May 2000, *National Post*). Cocaine, and other adulterants mentioned, cost much more to obtain. Nor is ecstasy difficult to make. Most ingredients are legal to obtain in Canada (15 March 2000, *National Post*) and instructions can easily be found on the Inter-net<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, the penalty for selling ecstasy is much lighter than for many other drugs. The maximum sentence for trafficking ecstasy is ten years, while similar offences for cocaine or heroin carry the possibility of life imprisonment (2003 Criminal Code of

---

<sup>10</sup> While researching this project I came across detailed manufacturing instructions regarding ecstasy on Inter-net sites such as [www.blackdogcafe.com](http://www.blackdogcafe.com) and [erowid.org](http://erowid.org).

Canada). Other additives, such as strychnine, arsenic and bleach are even more unlikely to be used as adulterants in ecstasy pills. If such substances were being used Toronto hospitals would be flooded with ill people and the death toll would have been much greater. Undoubtedly there was, and still is, adulterated ecstasy being sold in Toronto. However, a certain balance must exist between fake pills and appropriate recreational pills for use to continue. If it is true that ninety-percent of pills sold as ecstasy are, in fact, not ecstasy or that poisonous substances are being used as adulterants the demand for ecstasy would quickly disappear.

### **Toronto: The world's ecstasy center**

It appears that the mayor and police, among others, exaggerated Toronto's role in the ecstasy trade to get anti-rave laws passed. Shortly after forming "Operation Strike Force," a special police squad targeting "illegal after-hours clubs and raves," Mayor Lastman declared war on raves. The following day, the *National Post* showed approving coverage of the crackdown with an article titled "City is Ecstasy capital: police" (15 March 2000, *National Post*). According to Detective Randy Smith, head of the Clandestine Laboratory section of Toronto's Major Drugs unit, Toronto has become the "rave capital of North America and the capital of ecstasy consumption" (2 February 2000, *Toronto Star*). According to the Detective, "Its use is rampant. It's in every club downtown, in every all night party" (2 February 2000, *Toronto Star*). RCMP Superintendent Ben Soave offers confirmation, stating, "We know that Toronto is becoming the rave capital of North America and, unfortunately, the drug ecstasy is connected to raves" (18 May 2000, *National Post*). Toronto supposedly became a breeding ground for ecstasy production because "the major chemical components can be

bought legally at chemical supply companies. Then drug dealers simply need some lab equipment and a recipe-of which there are many easily found on the Internet” (15 March 2000, *National Post*). The *Toronto Star* informed readers that “Drug Lords find Toronto pure ecstasy” (26 February 2000) and that the city has become a major destination for European labs. According to a *Globe and Mail* article, Toronto has won the “dubious distinction” of being “the capital of North America of ecstasy-related deaths” (28 June 2000). Dr. Steven Kish claims that big cities in the United States “have seen few such deaths, compared with Toronto” (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Jim Cairns, deputy chief coroner, agreed and said “Toronto has far more ecstasy-related deaths than most other North American cities” and “Ecstasy now ranks as the top street drug in Ontario” (15 May 2000, *Toronto Star*).

The claim that Toronto ravers were continental drug lords gave American drug-officials a good laugh. Drug Enforcement Agency Spokesperson Ragene White was surprised, saying, “I don’t mean to make light, but I’ve never heard of this before” (Smith, 2000a). White felt the claim that Toronto was a major city for ecstasy production and consumption was more suited to the *National Enquirer* than the *National Post* (Smith, 2000a). Jim Mitchie, public affairs specialist with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration appears amused, asking, “You mean in Canada right? I’ve never heard anyone say a particular city was the capital, much less Toronto. I mean, why Toronto?” (Smith, 2000a) Soon after being criticized for exaggerating the extent of ecstasy use in Toronto, police quietly backed away from their earlier claim that Toronto was the North American capital of ecstasy. Detective Randy Smith said, “The whole thing about Toronto being number one in ecstasy, well, you’re not going to get every

ecstasy user to stand up and be counted” (Smith, 2000a). Instead of claiming that Toronto is North America’s ecstasy hotbed, Detective Smith now states the city has the possibility of becoming such. “I think that line itself, that Toronto is the North American capital of ecstasy-that’s kind of the summation of what it could become if we didn’t do what we’re doing. We fear that it could become that... Whether it can be proven is really irrelevant” (Smith, 2000a).

The claim that Toronto is awash in ecstasy received another setback a few months after the “ecstasy capital” fiasco. Several articles, with bold headlines such as “Police ecstatic at capture of sloppy pill smugglers” (18 May 2000, *National Post*) and “RCMP seize \$5-million worth of rave drug” (18 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*) describe how “the flood of Canada-bound ecstasy is now nearing an epidemic” (18 May 2000, *National Post*). Readers were made aware that Toronto had just been home to the “largest single seizure of the drug in Canada” (18 May 2000, *National Post*). Two and a half weeks later a sheepish three-paragraph RCMP press release advised that there had been a mix up. Police made a mathematical error and what was claimed to be 170, 000 units worth \$5 million was actually 61, 000 units worth \$1.8 million. On the day the pills were seized an “actual count couldn’t take place because of the quantity of pills and the need for forensic exams” so police weighed the stash and estimated the number of pills accordingly (3 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*). However, police confused metric and imperial measurement, resulting in a gross overestimate of quantity (3 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*). RCMP Superintendent Ben Soave commented, “It’s one of those unfortunate situations. It was an error we made and we’re only human. So I apologize for that” (3 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*). This meager apology is a dramatic contrast to the

ostentatious news conference held at Pearson International Airport and large *Globe and Mail* article containing a photograph of police proudly displaying the seizure. It is likely that many Toronto newspaper readers missed the clarification, as the *Globe and Mail* was the only paper to acknowledge it.

Although not unique to ecstasy, police overestimated the quantity of seizures and explicitly labeled ecstasy as the seized chemical before validating proof. For example, a front section *Toronto Star* (9 July 2000) headline, reporting on a clandestine laboratory bust, declared it to be an “Ecstasy lab that made 20 000 tabs a week.” A Health Canada chemist stated more people are producing ecstasy than speed and that “it seems that ecstasy use is outpacing anything we’ve ever seen before” (9 July 2000, *Toronto Star*). The next day the *Toronto Star* ran a story, located in the local news section, informing readers that it would be several months before analysis of the substances gathered from the raid would take place. Without such analysis the substances were, at most, suspected of being ecstasy. Despite this uncertainty the paper ran the story under the headline “Analysis delayed in *ecstasy* bust” and claimed a significant increase in ecstasy labs is the reason for the delay (10 July 2000, *Toronto Star*).

The presence of ecstasy is not always an established fact in reported “ecstasy-related deaths” either. This fact, however, is likely lost on readers. Headlines, such as “Ecstasy’s grim toll rises again” (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*) implied that ecstasy, and not another substance, is the cause of deaths. While reporting on the death of Beth Robertson, the *Globe and Mail* states matter-of-factly that she “died after taking ecstasy at a downtown club” (28 June 2000). Detective Martin French said Beth “took some ecstasy while in the club and left around 5 a.m. after complaining that she felt ill” (28

June 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Much of what follows is devoted to raising fear over the drug. Dr. Kish, head of the neurochemical pathology lab at Toronto's Centre For Addiction and Mental Health states, "If you drink a glass of wine, you're not going to die. If you take one tablet of ecstasy, you can die" (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*). One line, that was likely missed by many readers, appears less certain. In this isolated sentence the investigating coroner said that ecstasy is a strong suspicion, but not an established fact as the cause of death. There is a willingness of police and journalists to attribute responsibility to ecstasy, without validating proof.

Another incident of ecstasy-related death, Daniel Engson's, is reported in similar fashion. The *Toronto Star* article, "Teen bought ecstasy at club shortly before he died" (10 July 2001) is riddled with accusations against ecstasy. Once again ecstasy, however, had not been an established cause of death. Investigators were still waiting for toxicological testing to determine the cause of death after an autopsy yielded inconclusive results. Regional coroner Dr. William Lucas admitted, "We're still at the preliminary stages of this investigation. Our primary suspicion is that it is a drug-related death" (10 July 2001, *Toronto Star*). These cautious words are not echoed in the rest of the newspaper report. The article acknowledges that another drug may be responsible, by noting that Daniel died after taking "what he believed was ecstasy." However the remainder treats ecstasy as the undeniable culprit. The inclusion of Daniel's mother's plea to others to stop using ecstasy adds an emotional edge that makes ecstasy seem dangerous.

It is likely that some of the deaths that fueled press attention were in fact not the result of ecstasy but substitutes sold to unsuspecting customers. On one rare occasion

Peel Regional Police publicly admitted wrongly blaming ecstasy. The clarification, that only appeared in the *Toronto Star*, is so small it is barely noticeable. In this article it is noted “a person died last spring from a drug overdose after taking PMA, not ecstasy as initially believed” (7 February 2001, *Toronto Star*). The person’s identity, sex, age or location of death is unspecified, leaving readers unable to make a connection with past reports. Perhaps this mistaken case is one of the high profile deaths that rallied support for anti-ecstasy sentiments. Revealing the identity might have been detrimental to the fight against the “ecstasy problem.” Apparently journalists felt a PMA caused death to be insignificant, as they do not even offer a description of the drug so future incidents might be avoided. It is puzzling that the same group of claims-makers who continually warn the public not to take ecstasy because it may contain dangerous adulterants does not pay attention when such an adulterant is claiming lives. PMA (paramethoxyamphetamine) is a hallucinogenic amphetamine, unlike MDMA. This drug has been found in fake “ecstasy” tablets and has been responsible for a large number of deaths in the United States (Holland, 2001:161). Until recently there has been no test in Ontario to determine whether a person had taken PMA (7 February 2001, *Toronto Star*). Other Toronto area deaths attributed to ecstasy, perhaps even all deaths, may be due to PMA.

### **Violence/Guns**

When the rave phenomenon first appeared in Toronto, it did not attract the attention of law enforcement officials. One of the earliest articles, “They only come out at night,” (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*) describes how the police had taken a passive approach to rave control. Detective-Sergeant Craig Hilborn of the Toronto Police

Service's drug unit said, "When we find out about a rave party, then we'll monitor them" (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*). This lax attitude is typified in a depiction of officers supervising a rave. "A police cruiser sits idling, as its occupants gaze at the mall with apparent boredom. The two policemen have a long wait ahead. They've been assigned to watch over the party until it wraps up-in another four hours" (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*). The main concern on the part of police at this time was the age of the participants and the *possible* use of illicit drugs. Violence and crime were only mentioned because of their absence. According to Detective Hilborn there is little of the violence at raves that would cause a policing problem (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*). In fact, the only instance of rave violence mentioned in early articles came at the hands of Montreal police armed in riot gear beating party-goers with nightsticks (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*).

Previously absent claims of violence and crime became central features of the "ecstasy problem" in Toronto. The sudden inclusion of crime in claims-making strategies coincides with the appointment of new Police Chief, Julian Fantino and the subsequent establishment of Operation Strike Force. The special squad was formed on March 25, 2000 to focus on drug use at raves and the proliferation of guns in Toronto (18 May 2000, *National Post*). Several shootings during the early months of 2000 in downtown Toronto likely had many people worried. Although it is not clear the shootings were drug related, police implicated organized crime in the violence. Detective Randy Smith claims, "old style mobsters are mingling with street gangs, motorcycle gangs and other criminal groups in the drug trade. There is no ethnic loyalty any more. Money is the only loyalty" (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Each group is apparently



ving for control of the exploding ecstasy market resulting in a “violent turf war in after-hours clubs in downtown Toronto” (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*).<sup>11</sup>

The newly promoted threat of “ecstasy-related” violence and organized crime was likely seen by Chief Fantino as a perfect opportunity to denounce ecstasy and raves. Fantino held a press conference to brandish weapons supposedly seized at after-hour clubs and raves in an attempt to, as one reporter described, provide “clear evidence that Toronto after dark had gone crazy with guns” (24 February 2001, *Toronto Star*). Scores of guns and knives were trotted out before the national media and vaguely connected to raves for much of the news conference. When pressed by a local reporter as to whether all the displayed weapons had been found at raves, Fantino confirmed what he had been hinting at and replied, “There were raves, yes. A significant number of those were also after-hours clubs” (Smith, 2000b). Relying on this information, numerous media sources reported about raves, drugs and guns. For example, the *Globe and Mail* (April 29 and May 4 2000) detailed how police arrested forty-seven people at two city-sanctioned raves and “seized a large quantity of weapons and drugs.” The first of the aforementioned raves had previously been defended by the Chief who described it as a “good outcome” from the point of view of the organizers and police coming together to form a strategy that allowed police to monitor the event and make sure there were no serious consequences (28 March 2000, *National Post*). The second rave had not been reported on in Toronto newspapers.

---

<sup>11</sup> Even a ten year veteran of Toronto’s police force tried to become involved in trafficking ecstasy. Detective Darin Cooper used police intelligence to track down high-level drug dealers in the Toronto area and, with the help of his gang outfitted with badges, service-issue guns and bulletproof vests, rob them (22 February 2001, *Toronto Star*). The stolen money from such incidents was to be used toward bankrolling the importation of \$6 million worth of ecstasy. Police became aware of Cooper’s activities and he was ultimately sentenced to nine years in jail. One year later another officer, Constable Christopher Walpole was charged with selling ecstasy (29 August 2001, *Toronto Star*).

Despite the efforts made by Fantino to connect violence and raves not everybody was convinced. When asked to explain the breakdown of charges and seizures, head of Operation Strike Force, Superintendent Ron Taverner told reporters that none of the weapons displayed had been seized at raves. According to the Superintendent, raves contain little in the way of violence or weapons, unlike after-hours clubs (Smith, 2000b). Fantino's sleight of hand was noticed by *National Post* reporter, Donna Laframboise, who calls the incident "disturbing" (16 May 2000). Laframboise reported that the chief is either "badly misinformed or he's a hardline law-and-order crusader with highly questionable judgment" (16 May 2000, *National Post*). Such sentiments are echoed by those who provide security for Toronto's rave events. Alan Mizrachi, head of Atlas Security, told the Alan Ho inquest that "rave crowds are peaceful. It's a pleasure to work security at them" (11 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Raves are described as safe places to work because they do not have any of the fights, stabbings and shootings that are associated with after-hours clubs. Those in the rave community also felt misrepresented by the conflation of the two scenes. Amy Miranda, a Toronto raver of seven years, stressed that after-hours clubs and raves are two completely separate things and wondered why they were being grouped together (24 March 2000, *Toronto Star*).

### **Endangered Neighbours**

In the summer of 2000, after years of warning that ecstasy was endangering users, claims-makers broadened the category of those at risk. At this time a new supposed threat, of having an ecstasy lab in your neighbourhood became prominent in newspaper reports. Although Toronto police had not found any major ecstasy labs in Toronto (26 February 2000, *Toronto Star*) they claimed that "a scourge" of secret drug laboratories

sprouting up across Canada in residential areas were putting “innocent Canadians” at grave risk (29 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*).<sup>12</sup> Detective John Belleghem believed hundreds of people are “experimenting with this stuff [ecstasy] in their apartments and basements in mom-and-pop labs” (26 February 2000, *Toronto Star*). According to John Hugel, a Health Canada chemist responsible for investigating clandestine labs, more people are producing ecstasy than speed (9 July 2000, *Toronto Star*). This new threat is perceived as menacing because *anybody* can have had a lab set up. It was reported that unsuspecting neighbours of one such chemist never knew what was going on in their neighbourhood until they came home from work one day to find the house surrounded by emergency crews in white suits and goggles, fire trucks, police cars, an ambulance and a van with Hazardous Materials marked on its side (29 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Their quiet, thirty something neighbour, who let local youngsters swim in his pool, hardly seemed like a drug manufacturer. Neighbours suspected nothing in another instance where a university student ran a drug manufacturing operation out of an industrial strip mall. A surprised employee of the company located above the unit said, “It was a surprise to everyone to find a drug lab downstairs” (6 May 1999, *National Post*). In a third such instance a neighbour remarked, “I thought I was coming to a good area. I don’t know what’s going on, we’re still worried” (9 July 2000, *Toronto Star*).

According to claims-makers, drug manufacturers who ran these labs have little regard for their own safety or of those around them. Labs are portrayed as being run by inexperienced people working from ecstasy recipes off the Internet (26 February 2000, *Toronto Star*). Chemicals used to make ecstasy are volatile and exothermic (produced

---

<sup>12</sup> The language used in these articles parallels the alarmist vocabulary used in early Canadian drug panics. For example, Emily Murphy (1920), a prominent moral reformer of the 1920’s, warned of the dangers of

their own heat), creating the possibility of explosions. In the words of one *Globe and Mail* reporter “The cooks can get cooked” (29 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). The danger is not removed after the drugs are produced because byproducts are “as harmful to the environment as they are to humans” (12 April 2000, *Toronto Star*). Illegally dumped byproducts can seep into soil or water putting everyone at risk (12 April 2000, *Toronto Star*). Noxious vapours created by “the potentially fatal chemical concoctions” (9 July 2000, *Toronto Star*) are also seen as a threat. “A lot of the ingredients, if used improperly, are carcinogenic and could lead to cancer down the road. Just making it and being exposed to it, you can run the risk,” warned the *Toronto Star* (26 February 2000, *Toronto Star*). According to articles, labs are “filthy and disgusting” (18 May 2000, *National Post*) and have to be treated like hazardous waste sites, ultimately costing taxpayers thousands of dollars (29 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*).

### **Sexual Assault**

One “associated evil” (Best, 1987) I expected to encounter in newspaper coverage, sexual assault, was not as much a focus as I anticipated. Many materials, such as television programs, educational video’s and Internet sites, consulted prior to conducting the content analysis for this study led me to believe newspapers would focus on this issue. Frequently in these materials ecstasy was mentioned along with other “club drugs” such as GHB (gamma-hydroxy-butyrate, a “date rape” drug). Referring to ecstasy, often in the same breath, as date rape drugs, likely had an effect on ecstasy’s reputation. Ecstasy became guilty by association with these substances and likely many people came to believe that ecstasy was itself a “date rape drug.”

---

having an opium den in your neighbourhood.

Not only was ecstasy mentioned along with date rape drugs, ecstasy itself was implicated as a date rape drug in a few high profile incidents. While addressing the provincial legislature, in an effort to have her *Raves Act 2000* Bill passed, Sandra Pupatello referred to ecstasy as a “date rape drug” (Hansard, May 18, 2000). Jim Cairns, an Ontario coroner, took this claim a step further to suggest there are at least two instances where ecstasy pills were slipped into unsuspecting females drinks to facilitate rape. Furthermore, ecstasy was said to cause amnesia so the victim would not even know what happened. Sandra Pupatello claimed “there are many, many reports of young women getting into very, very serious trouble. Young women have been raped. Young women have died” (Hansard, May 18 2000). The identities of the dead young women remained a mystery, however, as all of those who had died in Ontario at that point were male. According to the politician, being under the influence of ecstasy made being “drunk look like a walk in the park” (Harder, 1999). Little corroboration for these fears about ecstasy is offered. Ecstasy is an “upper” and does not put users to sleep or cause amnesia. Some people may lose their inhibitions or feel an unusual closeness to another person but ecstasy does not cause a clouding of consciousness (Holland, 2001: 8; Eisner, 1994:3). Nevertheless Pupatello’s claims, and those of Dr. Cairns, gained a certain legitimacy through their similarity and proximity to stories about other drugs such as Rohypnol, the sleeping aid which has been used to facilitate rape (Moore and Valverde, 2000:516).

To my surprise, newspaper coverage devotes very little attention to sexual assault. In one rare instance of sexual assault being discussed in newspaper coverage of ecstasy, raves were said to be worrisome because of “the issue of personal security, especially for

vulnerable females taking drugs, who could be assaulted” (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*). It is not uncommon for newspapers to refer to ecstasy and GHB as if they are one and the same. One article mistakenly stated that GHB was the liquid form of ecstasy (16 May 2000, *National Post*) and another warns women to watch their drinks for designer drugs (31 March 2000, *Toronto Star*). This warning came after a series of drug busts at a Mississauga club in which ecstasy and GHB were seized. Journalist Juanita Losch fails to draw a distinction between the two substances, resulting in a report that makes ecstasy appear to be a date rape drug. The following passage illustrates how confusion among readers could have occurred. “As for nightclubs, I think Club 108 is one of the hot-spots for this type of drug (ecstasy). Last week, police found 302 millilitres-valued at \$600-of the date rape substance in a green pop bottle” (31 March 2000, *Toronto Star*). Even an article about the death of a male, Daniel Engson, contained a reference to spiked drinks. Readers were warned to “hang on to that drink if you want to make sure no one slips anything into it” (10 July 2001, *Toronto Star*).

### **Addiction**

Ecstasy is not addictive in the same way as drugs such as heroin, and produces no physical withdrawal symptoms when use is stopped (Saunders, 1995:86, Silcott and Push, 2000:12). Pharmacological factors appear to play a major role in limiting long-term abuse of ecstasy. Frequent use results in an almost complete loss of the loved-up “ecstasy feeling” and an increase in unpleasant effects (Silcott and Push, 2000:12). Although ecstasy is not addictive, three articles discuss the idea of ecstasy addicts. In the first article (7 September 1999, *Toronto Star*) a concerned raver wrote the advice column “Confidentially Yours” to ask whether it is possible to get addicted to ecstasy if used only

once. The uncertain answer given by the columnist is that “the studies are still out on that” and that “e could be psychologically addictive, in much the same way I’m addicted to chocolate and french fries” (7 September 1999, *Toronto Star*). In the second article Dr. Steven Kish relied on a liberal standard of addiction and said he “considered it to be addictive” but “not everybody gets hooked” (27 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Kish believed ecstasy was not as dangerous or addictive as cocaine or heroin, but said “the menace is in the unknown-it’s a wild card” (27 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). In a third, more forceful article it was stated, “while ecstasy is not physically addictive, the drug is so psychologically addictive that it prompts them to go to extremes to get it” (24 August 2001, *Toronto Star*). Philip McCarthy, a seventeen year old supposedly so addicted to MDMA that he started breaking into homes and stealing televisions and VCR’s to support his \$300-a week habit is put forward as evidence of the addictive nature of ecstasy.

### **Allan Ho**

It is a standard journalistic technique to open stories with an emotionally riveting “grabber” (Johnson 1986, Best 1987). By focusing on specific individuals it becomes easier to identify with the people affected by the problem. “Horror stories” (Johnson, 1986) give a sense of the problem’s frightening, harmful dimensions and also shape the perception of the problem. Similar to other cities, claims-makers in Toronto apparently tried to find a death that would most appropriately validate their claims. Dr. Jim Cairns, Toronto’s Deputy Chief Coroner, stated that “We’re looking at which ecstasy-related death would best be suited to get the message across to the public, the perfect case that demonstrates our concern” (29 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). The death of Allan Ho, a

Ryerson University student, was chosen. Ho, described in one article (9 May 2000, *National Post*) as “an ordinary young man” was indeed perfect for spreading fear about ecstasy. His death became a centre-point of an inquest during which ecstasy and raves were intensely scrutinized by Toronto newspapers.

Playing up Ho’s ordinariness in newspapers was an effective scare tactic with regard to discouraging ecstasy use. Undoubtedly, many of those who read newspaper articles about Ho’s death had children of a similar age. These parents, who might otherwise shrug off such a death as the result of risk taking or plain stupidity, would be forced to confront their worst fear, that their own sons and daughters might be using ecstasy. Newspaper articles describe Ho as “good son” and “a law abiding young man” (9 May 2000, *National Post*). Nobody would have suspected him to be a drug user. Even his close acquaintances, such as Henry Wong who testified at the inquest, “could not shed any light on whether his friend had a past history of ecstasy use” (9 May 2000, *National Post*). A poster that read “Me... on drugs” and a drug information guide from the Addiction Research Foundation was claimed to still hang above Allan’s bed after his death (18 May 2000, *Toronto Star*). The message implied in articles about Allan Ho, that anybody and everybody could be an ecstasy user, made the drug seem uniquely sinister.

The newspaper descriptions of Allan Ho’s death made individuals involved in the rave scene appear cold and callous. According to a *Toronto Star* article Ho “lay on his back on the blacktop of a garbage strewn underground parking garage, his eyes closed, his jaw and fists clenched” (9 May 2000, *Toronto Star*). Around him thousands of young people sweated in the heat of the soggy underground as they danced to the pulsating beat of techno music (9 May 2000, *Toronto Star*). Such reporting implied to readers that



nobody showed concern. In reality it is likely that others did not notice what was occurring. The description of ravers partying around a young man in his death throes did, however, make for good copy. Those in charge of running the event were portrayed as morally reprehensible. By selectively using quotation from Mr. Wong's testimony, the *Toronto Star* made it appear security working the event actually threw the two friends out because of Allan's condition. After discovering his ill friend, Wong claimed he "kept yelling his name and after a few minutes one of the bouncers came over and said 'Take him outside because he's overdosing'" (9 May 2000, *Toronto Star*). In a *National Post* article (9 May 2000, *National Post*) it was noted the security guard helped Mr. Wong carry his friend outside so paramedics hired by the event's promoter could attend to him.

Understandably upset after losing her son, Mui Phuong was probably not the best source of reasoned commentary on raves and ecstasy. Nevertheless, the *Toronto Star* ran an article "Parent wants raves banned" (18 May 2000). The article relies on Mui's account to graphically illustrate the pain and torment that this drug can cause. Preying on many parents' worst fears, media accounts include Mui describing how she received a "chilling phone call" while gone for the weekend. An ominous "voice on the other end" said, "Allen is in hospital. He was at a party... He's in danger. You must come home" (18 May 2000, *Toronto Star*). Having likely instilled fear in the older, worried parent demographic, subsequent newspaper articles about ecstasy appear to target those directly involved in ecstasy use and raving. The death of Beth Robertson is used by reporters to depict how ecstasy can take parents away from their children. Beth, a twenty-one year-old newlywed mother, was "beginning a new life with her husband and son after losing her previous boyfriend, her son's father, in a car accident" (28 June 2000, *Toronto Star*).

After taking ecstasy with her friend, Gary Wheeler, Beth did not want to “face her husband and young son in the state she was in” (24 July 2000, *National Post*). Instead she went to Wheeler’s house to sleep off the effects of the drug. In the morning Wheeler found Beth “unconscious and blue” (24 July 2000, *National Post*). A *National Post* article describes how “gases of an awful odour came out of Ms. Robertson’s mouth” when Wheeler administered CPR to her. It is claimed a white foamy substance and blood oozed out of her nose with each push (24 July 2000, *National Post*). The “simple weekend ritual” of going to raves and taking ecstasy with friends had turned deadly, prompting Mr. Wheeler to realize he was not invulnerable. A remorseful Wheeler said, “I’m never doing ecstasy again” (24 July 2000, *National Post*). This sensational language and vivid description of death seems to be a warning to those taking ecstasy and raving that such habits might put them in a similar situation.

### **Allan Ho Inquest**

When ecstasy-related deaths rose in Ontario, the coroner’s office decided to hold an inquest into the drug. Allan Ho’s death was chosen as the representative case, but twelve other deaths were supposed to play a significant part in the evidence presented regarding ecstasy-related harm. Much of the inquest focused on Toronto, as nine of the thirteen deaths occurred in the Greater Toronto Area. Likely due to focus on the city, Toronto newspapers devoted considerable coverage to the inquest. While the inquest into the death of Allan Ho probably turned ecstasy and raves into dinner-table conversation, it also created a false view of ecstasy fatalities. During a “remarkably adversarial hearing that was more trial than public inquiry” (30 May 2000, *National Post*) the other deaths were introduced but then largely ignored. Of the thirteen ecstasy-related deaths presented

to the jury, a range of circumstances and substances are involved. Seven of the deaths involved cocktails of drugs, including heroin, cocaine and methadone. Of thirty-five articles dealing with the inquest only seven mention this fact. It is arguable whether these seven cases should be labeled "ecstasy-related" deaths. It is not possible to know whether one drug, or a combination of drugs, caused death. In a rare bit of critical awareness, journalist Jennifer Prittie noted, "the most reliable conclusion to be drawn from the deaths, in fact, is that users need to be warned against taking more than one powerful drug at a time" (30 May 2000, *National Post*).

A central point of various claims-makers-that raves and ecstasy related deaths have a particular connection-seemed to be undermined during the inquest into the death of Allan Ho. Only three of the deaths investigated had any connection with raves, and only Ho's involved an underground rave. Thirteen of the thirty-five articles dealing with the inquest mention that most of the deaths occurred in environments other than raves. Three of the thirteen deaths occurred at home, two at bars in small Ontario cities, one at a park and another at a construction site (30 May 2000, *National Post*). In the other deaths it is not known where the drugs were consumed. For those individuals following media coverage of ecstasy it probably seemed difficult to accept the idea that ecstasy and raves are no more deadly a combination and ecstasy and other environments. Newspaper reporting up to this point, and even afterwards, continued to focus on only rave-related ecstasy deaths. In fact, during the May 24 weekend of the inquest three additional deaths involving ecstasy (and possibly other substances) with no connection to raves occurred (30 May 2000, *National Post*). Perhaps reluctant to discredit the rave-ecstasy death combination, two of the three surveyed newspapers did not report the deaths.

### Erroneous and misleading claims

In addition to implying that ecstasy is a “date rape drug” reaching “epidemic proportions,” newspaper coverage relays some other myths and rumours to readers. The first misconception that circulated about ecstasy is that it is a “designer drug” (24 March 1992, *Toronto Star*). Generally speaking, a “designer drug” refers to a substance synthesized in a laboratory in an attempt to imitate some better known chemical. This imitation might be undertaken to make a drug cheaper, safer, more effective, or to circumvent the law (Jenkins, 1999:6). As noted earlier, ecstasy was first synthesized in 1912, largely by mistake, and is not technically a “designer drug.” Applying the label “designer drug” to ecstasy carries the implication that it is as lethal as substances such as the synthetic heroins of the 1980’s that had caused brain damage, a severe Parkinson’s-like syndrome and death (Jenkins, 1999:7). Likely out of confusion, when referring to ecstasy one *Globe and Mail* reporter said, “the drug can cause a form of Parkinson’s disease” (25 March 2000). RCMP Staff Sergeant Bill Matheson contributed to the rumour by noting, “There are tons of health issues. Its use is linked to Parkinson’s disease” (2 February 2000, *Toronto Star*).

Two other misconceptions perpetuated by Toronto newspapers are a belief that ecstasy drained users spinal fluid and that it is a “gateway drug.” Dave Bidini, a writer for the *Toronto Star*, informed readers that ecstasy “works by tapping a fluid from the spine capable of simulating euphoric sensations” (17 July 1993, *Toronto Star*). Actually, the only way to remove spinal fluid is with a surgical procedure called a lumbar puncture, or spinal tap (Holland, 2001:54). In the mid-1980’s some research on ecstasy users required spinal taps and this may account for this rumour (Holland, 2001:54). Ecstasy is

also portrayed as a “gateway drug” (August 3 and 8 2000, *Toronto Star*) that put users on a slippery slope toward addiction to other drugs. According to Theresa, a methamphetamine addict, “when you start raving you do ecstasy and you would never do crystal. You’re sociable and happy and when you come down from ‘e’ your brain might be mush, but at least you can sleep. Then you start doing crystal and crystal’s not like that. Crystal changes people” (23 February 1999, *Toronto Star*). Inevitably, at least according to this article, all ecstasy users will experiment with methamphetamine and become addicted because “everyone who does crystal is addicted” (23 February 1999, *Toronto Star*).

### **Description of ecstasy users**

The image of ecstasy users in the media is not constant. The anti-ecstasy campaign initially targeted teens and college students, with the implication that young people were the only ones using ecstasy. After the belief that ecstasy was the exclusive domain of ravers was challenged, most notably during the Allan Ho inquest, claim-makers appeared to shift their tactics. Instead of rave exposes, newspapers began to run “ecstasy isn’t just for ravers” stories. Middle aged parents and professionals became the focus of attention to show that anybody could be a user and that ecstasy is a society wide “problem” (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*; 15 August 2000, *National Post*; 19 August 2000, *National Post*). Police in Toronto began to stress the changing demographics of ecstasy users in early 2000. Descriptions of ecstasy frequently become accompanied by phrases such as “It’s no longer a rave drug anymore. It’s gotten into the mainstream” (15 August 2000, *National Post*), “We’re finding it more with this upwardly mobile crowd” (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*), “It’s everywhere” (15 June 1999, *Toronto Star*).

Toronto newspapers, seemingly following the lead of police, emphasized the “middle-aged, middle-class world of ecstasy” (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*). “What do architects, teachers, real-estate developers and bankers have in common?” asked the *Globe and Mail* (25 March 2000). The answer given is “a little round pill named ecstasy” (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Whereas younger users see ecstasy as a social drug, a music enhancer, older professionals are said to view ecstasy as a spiritual (and sexual) mini-vacation (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Older users described in articles contribute a new dimension to the “ecstasy threat.” Police and health care workers, who were increasingly warning about the plague-like spread of ecstasy, are merely confirming “what a legion of us already knew” (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). Ecstasy in Ontario is portrayed as “moving from the rave scene to the mainstream, into the realm of 30 and 40 something circles populated by lawyers and schoolteachers” (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). Respectable professionals in nice, clean neighbourhoods are believed to be turning on to ecstasy’s blissful high (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Ecstasy’s new users are described in the *Globe and Mail* as “people with good jobs. People who look good and want to take a pill that will make them feel good” (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*). The *National Post*, in one of its more unlikely claims, even suggests that ecstasy use is growing among senior citizens (15 August 2000).

The appearance of a recent article, “The few, the proud, the stoned” (28 July 2002, *Toronto Star*) indicates another shift in the portrayal of ecstasy users. Uneasy from the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the increasing tension with Iraq, North Americans have become preoccupied with safety and security. William Walker, a writer for the *Toronto*

*Star*, took advantage of these fears and wrote an article in which he claimed that “the ecstasy epidemic is far from over.” According to Walker, ecstasy has become the drug of choice for a new breed of users: soldiers. No longer do the repercussions of ecstasy consumption fall solely on the individual user. The safety and security of the entire nation is now being threatened.

### **Evidence of “objective harm”**

A reader wishing to learn about the “established” dangers of ecstasy would find coverage in the selected newspapers lacking. Of the one hundred and eight-three articles examined, only nineteen refer to specific scientific evidence or studies to validate claims. Only in seven articles are such studies the primary focus. On the rare occasion when claims-makers cite scientific or statistical evidence to support their claims, they rely on only a few sources. One is the Ontario Student Drug Use Survey, a monitoring project set up to describe the rates and patterns of drug use among Ontario students. In addition, a sociological study (Weber 1999) about the prevalence of rave attendance and drug use among adolescents from Toronto is cited. Since these two sources are considered by claims-makers to be the most reliable evidence available, it is important to review what their results actually indicate about ecstasy.

The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey collects data on a whole series of drugs- from ritalin to heroin. This survey is the longest ongoing study of adolescent drug use in Canada (Adlaf and Paglia, 2001:1). Unfortunately, no such monitoring project exists for adults in Ontario. Every two years, since 1977, a random sample of approximately 4,000 students dispersed throughout Ontario is taken (Adlaf and Paglia, 2001:1). For all surveys, Ontario is divided into four regions: Toronto, Northern Ontario, Eastern Ontario,

and Western Ontario. Data is provided for two groups of students: those in grade 7, 9, 11 and 13 (grade levels surveyed between 1977 and 1997) and also those in grades 7 through 13 inclusive (included since 1999). The major aim of the Ontario Student Drug Use Survey is to provide information on the extent of drug use by students, trends in use, the extent and nature of related problems, and attitudes and beliefs about alcohol and other drug use (Adlaf and Paglia, 2001:1).

One of the core claims found in newspaper accounts is that use of ecstasy has grown at an alarming rate. While politicians and police often refer to use as “epidemic” or “out of control,” the best official evidence does not support such claims. According to Adlaf and Paglia (2001:102), ecstasy first appeared in Canada in 1989. The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey began to monitor the use of ecstasy in 1991, when less than .5% of surveyed students had tried the drug. This rose to .6% in 1993, 1.8% in 1995, 3.1% in 1997, 4.8% in 1999 and reached 6% in 2001. Although there has been a pattern of increased use over the years, the rate of increase has slowed and has never warranted the apocalyptic warnings issued. It must be kept in mind that the vast majority of students (93%) have never even tried ecstasy, and 94% have not used it in the previous year. Of those who have experimented, 61% reported taking ecstasy only once or twice in the last year. An additional 24% reported three to nine times of usage, meaning that only 15% of those who use ecstasy do it with any regularity. What is particularly interesting is that the rate of use for the Toronto area was actually decreasing (from 7.3% in 1999 to 5.8% in 2001) when the moral panic over ecstasy erupted. Contrary to claims found in the newspapers, ecstasy remains a niche drug and has never been near an epidemic level of usage.



Another core claim in reporting contradicted by the Ontario Student Drug Use Survey is that people felt ecstasy is harmless. Among the drug behaviours surveyed, students reported feeling that the greatest risk is associated with regular marijuana use (49.2% perceiving it as a great risk), followed by trying cocaine (33.4%), trying ecstasy (32%), daily drinking (29.9%), and trying LSD (29.5%) (Adlaf and Paglia, 2001:150). It is noteworthy that students felt trying ecstasy is a greater risk than daily drinking. Granted, many young people are ignorant of the dangers of alcohol consumption but this research shows attitudes toward ecstasy are not as lax as newspaper portrayals would have us believe. When all grades are included (7-13), the percentage viewing ecstasy as risky is 32% in 2001 (Adlaf and Paglia, 2001:153).<sup>13</sup> Also interesting is the finding that 39.2% of students surveyed strongly disapprove of trying ecstasy (Adlaf and Paglia, 2001:155). This disapproval rate is similar to the other drugs asked about (cocaine, marijuana, LSD, alcohol). Perception of availability for ecstasy is quite high, with 28.3% claiming it was “easy” or “very easy” to obtain (Adlaf and Paglia, 2001:156). Despite being so easily obtained, very few students have chosen to use ecstasy. This evidence presented in the 2001 Ontario Student Drug Use Survey suggests that claims-makers, at the very least, overemphasized and distorted survey findings to facilitate their arguments.

The sociological study, “Raving in Toronto: Peace, Love, Unity, Respect in Transition” (Weber, 1999), cast further doubt on claims made about ecstasy. Newspaper accounts often suggested the only reason people attend raves is to use drugs. They refer to ecstasy as the substance of choice. Weber (1999:117), however, found that many of those individuals interviewed believed “only going to parties to use drugs was

---

<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately questions about attitudes and perceptions of ecstasy were not asked about until 2001 and so no comparison could be drawn with past figures.

inappropriate behaviour” and that marijuana, not ecstasy, is the actual drug of choice.

Offering an explanation of the media’s inaccurate portrayal, Weber notes, “marijuana is not as interesting or sexy as drugs like ecstasy or GHB. Media hunger for fashionable drugs and talk of legalizing pot under the guise of medical marijuana has made smoking a joint less outre” (2 September 1999, *National Post*).

The most frequently used yardstick to substantiate the seriousness of the “ecstasy problem” in Toronto newspapers is reference to “ecstasy-related” deaths.<sup>14</sup> Although rarely mentioned in newspaper accounts, the actual risk of death from all causes in association with taking ecstasy is in the region of one in a million exposures.<sup>15</sup> Despite being a very, very rare occurrence, newspapers make reference to fatalities in fifty-three percent of articles pertaining to ecstasy and raves. Caution is needed in assessing claims made for “ecstasy-related deaths” for various reasons. First, it is possible that some of the deceased had not been using ecstasy, but rather a pill containing a more lethal chemical. If such adulterants caused the death it is unfair to blame ecstasy. Second, traces of ecstasy in the system of the deceased does not automatically establish a causal link to their death. The term “ecstasy-related death” is employed uncritically in newspaper coverage. At its most absurd, the *National Post* reported that “police are investigating a possible rave-related death after a 21-year-old died in a car accident on the way to a rave” (8 August 2000). Third, it is possible that environmental factors rather than direct effects of the drug caused some deaths. Prolonged dancing, in crowded clubs, without rest and without drinking enough liquid to allow for normal temperature control

---

<sup>14</sup> Over the course of newspaper coverage, thirteen specific “ecstasy-related deaths” were mentioned. Of these, four occurred in Ontario outside Toronto, one in Nova Scotia, two in British Columbia and one in England. Approximately a dozen more “ecstasy-related deaths” occurred in the Greater Toronto Area throughout this period but were not specifically referred to.

# NOTE TO USERS

Page(s) not included in the original manuscript and are unavailable from the author or university. The manuscript was scanned as received.

This reproduction is the best copy available.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CLAIMS-MAKERS

The emergence, maintenance and history of claims-making is the core of social constructionist research (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977:76). Social problems are defined, not in terms of objective conditions, but as the outcome of claims-making activity. Claims-making is the process through which issues are problematized and claims are articulated and advanced (Best, 1995). Claims-making is a rhetorical activity in which participants use persuasive arguments to advance their interests and shape our sense of what the “problem” is (Best, 1987).

The recent furor over ecstasy appears to stem from the efforts of a few highly visible claims-makers. I identify thirteen categories of claims-makers who played a role in the creation of ecstasy as a social problem: law enforcement officials, politicians, academics and researchers, ravers, harm reduction workers, the Mayor of Toronto, lawyers, rave promoters/club owners, the Chief of police, DJ's, coroner, ecstasy users other than ravers, and others. Table 6 captures the types of claims-makers, their affiliations, and the frequency with which they are mentioned.

**Table 6: Definers of the “ecstasy problem”**

	<u>N</u>	<u>% of articles</u>
Law enforcement officials (excluding chief of police)	50	27
Politicians	30	16
Ravers	16	9
Ecstasy users (other than ravers)	5	3
Harm reduction workers	15	8
Academics and researchers	28	15
The Mayor of Toronto	15	8
Chief of Toronto Police Service	11	6
Promoters/club owners	11	6
DJ's	7	4
Coroner	7	4
Lawyers	12	7
Other	43	23

**Law enforcement officials**

Law enforcement officials, quoted in 27% of the articles (50 articles in total), are the most frequent source of claims. Since 1996, in the second Toronto newspaper article on ecstasy and raves, police are involved in claims-making activities. Usually statements are not made on behalf of the police organization but reflect officers' own opinions. The views of members of Toronto, Calgary, Peel and York Police Services, as well as the RCMP and an ex-Los Angeles Police Department officer are cited. In general, police claims center on a few basic themes: extent of use, adulteration, the dangers of raves and the involvement of organized crime. Officers appear so determined to demonize raves and discredit the view of ecstasy as relatively safe that their comments seem overstated, exaggerated, flawed or misleading. Comparing ecstasy use to a nuclear meltdown, Constable Rob Cullen said, “A lot of people who lived next door to Chernobyl didn't feel any effects the day after the meltdown” (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). Police

portrayed raves as “a perfect avenue for drug use” and stated that parents who let their children go to these events are “sending lambs to a slaughter” (15 March 2000, *National Post*). Toronto Police Sergeant Guy Courvoisier maintained that “not all rave parties are firetrap, drug dens” (30 June 1996, *Toronto Star*), effectively implying that most are.

Threatening metaphors and unsubstantiated claims often accompany police discussion of ecstasy. One such metaphor, the concept of an epidemic, has been so overused in “drug panics” that it has become an empty cliché. According to police there is an “epidemic of drug use” in Toronto (17 May 2000, *Toronto Star*), “the flood of Canada-bound ecstasy is now nearing an epidemic” (18 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*) and “this whole ecstasy thing is reaching epidemic proportions, when you look at the numbers” (18 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Other claims by law-enforcement officials concerning ecstasy include, “Our estimates are that up to 80% of young people at raves are taking illicit drugs” (18 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*) and “90% of the drugs sold as ecstasy are not really ecstasy” (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*). No sources are included to support these claims.

Whether the drug is opium in the early 1900’s, marijuana in the 1930’s, LSD in the 1960’s, crack in the 1980’s or present day ecstasy, law enforcement officials appear to follow a very similar script. Reports are made of a “new” drug that will soon reach “epidemic” proportions. The dangers of the drug are stressed, however the drug acquires a reputation for providing pleasurable effects. Warnings are given about organized crime, addiction, sexual assault, etc. The “new” drug is related to previously demonized drugs. Ecstasy, for example, became the “LSD of the 1990’s” (8 June 1989, *Toronto Star*) and ravers compared to hippies (14 July 1998, *Toronto Star*). In many cases the

claims made by law enforcement officials justify the term panic because they are disproportionate to the scale of the problem and prevalence of use.

### **Mayor Mel Lastman**

The most visible and entertaining of those making claims about ecstasy is the Mayor of Toronto, Mel Lastman. Demonstrating a mixture of well-intentioned concern and ignorance, Lastman always seemed willing to offer an opinion on ecstasy and raves. Sometimes his comments are exaggerated, sometimes misinformed, and sometimes in direct opposition to his previous statements.

Initially, Lastman was supportive of raves, provided they occurred with adequate supervision in appropriate venues. In December 1999, Lastman, City Council and the rave community passed a protocol of standards for raves by a unanimous 39-0 vote. It is stated in the *National Post* that many councilors willingness to give the protocol their blessing was based almost entirely on an emotional speech made by the Mayor (10 May 2000). An excerpt from this speech demonstrates the mayor's support of legalized raves.

I endorse this wholeheartedly. I don't want to see kids get killed. I want to see adults there. I would rather have kids go to legalized raves that we can watch, ones we can observe, than the underground ones where we don't know what's happening. The kids-good kids-are going to these places because they're looking for a place to go. This is what we should be doing and we should be having people there to supervise them, look after them. We know there will be police there-whether they're undercover or whatever-but they will be there and they will be there to watch and they will be there to make sure that the kids don't get into trouble. I endorse this wholeheartedly. Look I don't want to see kids get into trouble. I don't want to see kids get hurt. I don't want to see them get hit over the head with a bottle. I want to see some adults there. I want to see some protection there and that's what this does. So let's endorse this wholeheartedly-not partially. I know this is the right way to go. (18 December 1999, *National Post*)

On March 15, Lastman revealed that a special “strike force” had been formed to close down illegal after-hours clubs and raves. Lastman informed newspaper readers, “Our city...will not tolerate illegal after-hours clubs and raves. Starting right now, we will do everything in our power to shut them down. We will use our police, our fire department, our bylaw inspectors, our building and zoning people-everyone we need-to padlock these dens of drugs and guns. This is a strike force and we will strike hard, we will strike fast” (15 March 2000, *National Post*). While striking at illegal raves, the mayor was still supportive of supervised ones. Despite nineteen drug-related arrests at a March 26<sup>th</sup> city-sanctioned rave, the mayor hailed the rave a success and pledged his continued involvement in such events. “I think it went well. It was supervised and nobody was killed. And there were police officers there” (28 March 2000, *National Post*). Lastman added, “I would rather see them supervised than just being run underground and we don’t know what’s going on and people get killed” (28 March 2000, *National Post*).

Only one month later Lastman expressed disapproval of all raves and introduced a motion to ban city-sponsored events. Reacting to arrests at two raves (one of which was the aforementioned “success”) Lastman stated, “We are going to stop the raves. At the next council meeting I’m putting forward a motion. No more raves, the legalized ones in Toronto. The police feel very strongly” (4 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Lastman concluded that the city policy of holding raves under public supervision was wrong. According to the Mayor, “We can’t control them” (4 May 2000, *National Post*). No longer supportive of police monitored raves, Lastman claimed, “When you get 8,000 people there, you can’t control what they do and you can’t control how crazy the people



get once they take the drugs” (4 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Lastman’s portrayal of people under the influence of ecstasy is almost identical to Murphy’s (1920) description of those under the influence of marijuana. In her book “*The Black Candle*” marijuana was said to drive users completely insane and turn them into raving maniacs. In another *Toronto Star* article Lastman elaborates on his error in judgment.

I was one of the people who said, if we can put these raves under a controlled atmosphere maybe they’ll be safe and I said let’s give it a try. Let me tell you, it’s not working. This is not the Toronto I want, this is not the Toronto I want to be part of and these are not the things we want to see happen. When people take this ecstasy...they go nuts and you cannot control them, and the cops cannot control them. (11 May 2000, *Toronto Star*)

Raves, in the Mayor’s eyes, had become “a place for drug pushers” (4 May 2000, *National Post*) and “nothing more than a haven for drug dealers” (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*). To excuse his backing out of the safe rave protocol, Lastman admitted his ignorance. “I didn’t know what a rave party was. I was definitely wrong when I went along with them. With the police there I didn’t think there’d be drugs. By the time Chief Fantino presents his report in August he’ll show you what a rave party really is” (11 May 2000, *National Post*).

The Mayor’s sudden turnaround on the subject of city sanctioned raves left reporters and City Councilors confused. Councilor Frances Nunziata was initially opposed to city sanctioned raves but was convinced by the mayor that a total ban “would leave young people open to danger” (10 May 2000, *National Post*). Lastman persuaded her to become co-chair of the Toronto Rave Task Force. This group, with the cooperation of former police chief, David Boothby, created the Safe Rave Protocol in

1999. Referring to the Mayor in May of 2000, Councilor Nunziata is quoted in the *National Post* as stating, “now it’s him that wants to shut everything down. It wasn’t the right thing to do last fall and it’s certainly not the right thing to do now. It makes a mockery of the task force process and Council’s support for the dance safety protocol” (10 May 2000, *National Post*). Many of Nunziata’s colleagues, including those representing the ward where Exhibition Place, the site of most city-sanctioned raves, agreed. Councillor Joe Pantalone pointed out that although more than 100, 000 young people have attended raves there in the past three years there has not been one serious injury (10 May 2000, *National Post*).

Perhaps worried about appearing as a bully, Lastman softened his position on the rave protocol even though he seemed no better informed. Several statements were issued to placate those who might have disagreed with Lastman’s change in position. In one statement, Lastman said, “Nobody here wants to spoil anybody’s fun. Nobody here wants to stop people from dancing. We just want everyone to get home safely” (6 August 2000, *Toronto Star*). Lastman claimed that he had no problem with raves except for the presence of ecstasy and the lack of water (26 July 2000, *National Post*). In another article the mayor is quoted as saying, “Nobody knows what ecstasy is. Nobody knows what’s in it. Even the scientists don’t know and they don’t know why it kills people. We don’t know why and I don’t want this to be a place of ecstasy, and raves is ecstasy. I don’t think you have a rave without ecstasy” (26 July 2000, *National Post*). Perhaps in an effort to salvage his reputation among ravers, Lastman complimented those involved in the iDance rally, an event organized to show support for raves. “I tell you. I was even impressed with them. After the rave was over, I saw all kinds of litter all over

the place. They cleaned it up. That was great" (3 August 2000, *National Post*). Two days later, after five hours of debate, Toronto council voted 50-4 to allow raves at municipal facilities. Since that time Mayor Lastman has not spoken publicly about ecstasy or raves.

### **Police Chief Julian Fantino**

Although at first glance it appears that Mayor Lastman is the key claims-maker in the ecstasy panic, it is actually the Chief of Police, Julian Fantino, who led the attack against raves and ecstasy. According to Don Wanagas, City Hall columnist for the *National Post*, nothing happened between December 1999 and May 2000 that could explain the change in the mayor's opinion of city sanctioned raves, other than the "overly moralistic Julian Fantino being appointed as Toronto's new chief of police" (10 May 2000). "It would seem all chief Julie has to do was whisper the words law and order into Lastman's ear and his Melness will do a complete 180-degree about-face on an issue" (10 May 2000, *National Post*) wrote the columnist. Will Chang, of the Toronto Dance Safe Committee, also recognized that the chief was calling the shots and accused Fantino of being "out of the loop" on rave culture. "It's all being pushed by the chief. The mayor has admitted he's working entirely on the chief's recommendation," said Chang (11 May 2000, *Toronto Star*).

It was rumoured that Fantino's increasingly moralistic tone became a concern to Lastman, who feared offending voters. An unnamed City Hall insider told the *National Post* that, "There's a lot of tension between the mayor and the chief of police right now. The tail has been trying to wag the dog on this one and the dog doesn't really appreciate it" (13 May 2000, *National Post*). According to Don Wanagas (13 May 2000, *National*

*Post*), Lastman backed out of a news conference where he and Fantino were supposed to jointly raise concerns about a drug problem at city-sanctioned raves. Fantino did the conference alone, and instead of simply answering questions as he was supposed to, he delivered a sermon.

Drugs and drug abuse are the curse of the century. We as a police department, police agency, law enforcement people cannot be held accountable for all of these issues. Nor can we do parenting on behalf of everyone else who abandons their responsibility toward their children. I cannot be held accountable for why it is that children run to these things. I don't want to moralize about this, but we have very young children out at all hours of the night. (13 May 2000, *National Post*)

When some City Councillors suggested that Fantino was overdramatizing the situation, and that raves supervised by police are better than the underground variety, the chief insinuated that Council was promoting the use of drugs. After one politician challenged his understanding of the rave scene Fantino responded by saying, "The drug scene prevails" (13 May 2000, *National Post*). His strong stance caused Don Wanagas to label Fantino "a full-gospel top cop" and state that "it won't be too long before the place [referring to the police station] becomes known as Reverend Julie's Marble Pulpit" (13 May 2000, *National Post*).

Several of Fantino's claims achieved widespread attention in Toronto newspaper media. Among his noteworthy claims was the suggestion that eighty percent of those at raves use drugs like ecstasy and GHB and that twenty five percent of attendees are sixteen or younger (11 May 2000, *Toronto Star*). He described raves as "young people rolling around on the floor, basically squirming in their own vomit" (11 May 2000,

*Toronto Star*) and claimed, “these displays of youthful abandon threaten the very fabric of Canadian life” (4 August 2000, *National Post*). According to Fantino, ecstasy abuse represented a health and safety emergency that could easily become an epidemic (16 May 2000, *National Post*). In one headline-attracting incident, the media-savvy Chief wrote a three-page letter to Prime Minister Jean Chretien expressing concern about how raves were being promoted at schools with brochures depicting nudity and glamorizing the use of illegal drugs (10 May 2000, *Toronto Star*). In the highly publicized letter, Fantino offered to escort the Prime Minister to a Toronto rave so he could witness “kids, most of them under sixteen, high on drugs” (16 May 2000, *National Post*). Fantino also invited the Prime Minister to spend a night with police on the streets of Toronto to see the “real problem” (29 April 2000, *Globe and Mail*).<sup>16</sup>

Convincing the mayor, and other important people, to ban city sanctioned raves appeared to be Fantino’s short-term solution. The ultimate, some would argue ulterior, goal appears to be attracting federal funding for a national drug campaign. According to Fantino, such a campaign would “help families regain lost ground to criminals’ systematic efforts to foster the drug culture nationwide (10 May 2000, *Toronto Star*).”<sup>17</sup> The Chief’s wish list includes a coordinated effort to educate children about the dangers of drugs, alternative ways for young people to enjoy themselves, the power to close down businesses that benefited from drug activity and laws with teeth to punish repeat criminals who preyed on young people (29 April 2000, *Globe and Mail*). What Canada

---

<sup>16</sup> Fantino’s moral entrepreneurship appears similar to Mackenzie King’s efforts to outlaw opium in the early 1900’s. Both men relied on moral arguments and questionable information to mobilize politicians and press to condemn drugs.

<sup>17</sup> Fantino’s attempt to attract funding by exaggerated claims about ecstasy parallels the United State’s Drug Enforcement Agency’s efforts in the 1930’s and 1940’s to condemn marijuana. Propaganda films such as *Reefer Madness* and *Small Town Ecstasy* are one result of such claims-making.

needs, Fantino said, is a national strategy to give the police the tools they needed to tackle the escalating problem of drugs, guns and young people.

We need a national strategy that recognizes that we have in fact a problem to begin with, that there is a health issue, that it's a health emergency. If we don't deal with it effectively, we're going to have some irreversible effects for years to come and for generations to come in this country. (29 April 2000, *Globe and Mail*)

It is interesting that Fantino views ecstasy as a health issue but appeals to criminal penalties as the solution. Such contradictory logic has been evident throughout various anti-drug campaigns of the past.

### **Steven Kish**

Steven Kish, head of the neurochemical pathology lab at Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, is also prominent in making claims. Kish's opinion regarding ecstasy progressed from cautiously concerned to alarmed. In the first article that Kish is quoted in (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*), the researcher appears wary of overstating the risk posed by ecstasy. "Ecstasy can cause death. It's a small risk, but it exists. In my opinion, the risk of death from ecstasy is much, much lower than the risk of dying from alcohol" (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). Kish was also hesitant when interpreting the significance of research that apparently demonstrated ecstasy caused brain damage.

Most scientists agree that, in studies of monkeys and rodents, high doses of ecstasy are known to damage serotonin nerve endings in the brain. Does this happen in the human? It's too early to say. But the preliminary suggestion is there could be cognitive damage with prolonged, chronic use. (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*)

In the next article containing commentary from Kish, "Ecstasy: A Second Opinion" (27 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*), it is obvious that the researchers stance had changed. The large, bold print subtitle, "It can kill but no one knows how," and introductory sentence, "Steven Kish keeps human brains in a deep freezer, they belong to people who used the designer drug ecstasy" set the tone for the article (27 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). After completing the "first study of the brain of an individual who used ecstasy," Kish now made it clear that he believes ecstasy is addictive and can cause long-term damage, or even death. He said bluntly, "A dead body does not lie. It's not a safe drug. And we are not just spouting the party line" (27 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Still, Kish is careful not to claim definitive answers, saying, "We don't know if this is an acute but reversible effect. My working hypothesis is that it is a combination of both" (27 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*).

By the third article that contained quotes from Kish (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*), he rejects his neutral researcher status and becomes actively involved in claims-making. Kish claimed, "Toronto appears to be the capital of North America of ecstasy-related deaths" (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Apparently annoyed that ecstasy was still widely regarded as harmless, Kish tried to stress that ecstasy, taken alone, can kill. In direct opposition to his prior comments about alcohol, Kish stated, "If you drink a glass of wine, you're not going to die. If you take one tablet of ecstasy, you can die. It's not the same as drinking alcohol. Taking ecstasy can kill you" (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*).

## Jim Cairns

Dr. Jim Cairns, Ontario's Deputy Chief Coroner, also makes claims about ecstasy in Toronto newspapers. Cairns, and those in the Coroner's Office, became concerned about ecstasy after three deaths "related to drugs and rave parties" occurred in 1999 (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). Adding fuel to an already heated debate over the drug's potential dangers, Cairns promised to conduct an inquest into one of the deaths. "Our office is not taking a stand. Our office is saying there is an issue here. We feel it's time to be addressed in a proper forum such as an inquest that can, having heard all things, be valuable to the public in terms of public safety" (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). As noted earlier, the case of Allan Ho was chosen as a typical example.

During his inquest testimony Cairns emphasized that *any* use of ecstasy, even responsible use, is dangerous. The risk of ecstasy use is unpredictable and therefore it is "unsafe in any amount" (13 May 2000, *National Post*). According to Cairns, ecstasy is not as dangerous or addictive as cocaine or heroin but the menace is in the unknown. "We don't know what the safe level is. The only safe level is zero" (13 May 2000, *National Post*). Ecstasy pills are made in clandestine labs and "so you don't know what you're getting. You're playing Russian roulette as to whether the pill you are getting is what you think it is" (15 May 2000, *Toronto Star*). To reinforce his anxiety, Cairns overstepped his knowledge and pronounced ecstasy the "top street drug marketed in Ontario" and claimed that Toronto had "far more ecstasy-related deaths than most other major North American cities" (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*). No objective evidence is provided to back these claims.



## Ravers

Despite being a vital element of the “ecstasy problem”, ravers are only quoted in sixteen articles (9%). Five articles contain quotes from people who use ecstasy but do not consider themselves ravers. Even articles describing the rave scene rarely rely on the accounts of participants. This neglect of ravers opinions is an unchanging fact over the study period. Quotations from ravers came mainly in the first few years of coverage and occur very infrequently thereafter. There is an almost regulated silencing of ecstasy-users voices within newspaper coverage. On the rare instances when ravers were allowed to give their input, the quotations selected often portray them as naïve. For example, during a massive rally to protest against rave restrictions, one longtime raver declared, “It’s hot, crowded, sweaty. It’s great! People are giving out gum, candy snacks and flyers” (2 August 2000, *Globe and Mail*). This particular raver appeared more interested in the carnival atmosphere than political action. In an example of self-defeating commentary, one young man describes raves as “a big time drug party” (30 June 1996, *Toronto Star*). Such commentary can be considered self-defeating because it lends credence to the view that raves are simply about drugs. Selection of such juvenile responses might be a method of discrediting ravers by showing that ecstasy use *is* a problem, and allowing “official” sources to define the phenomenon virtually unchallenged.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In what follows, I briefly review the main themes that characterized Toronto newspapers' construction of the "ecstasy problem." Consistent with Best's (1995) contextual constructionist approach, I suggest that "objective evidence" do not support claims made. Nobody, myself included, claims ecstasy is benign. It is not. No drug is. Yet none of the risks associated with ecstasy pose a serious public health problem. Rhetoric, rather than science, appears to account for the level of concern and coverage ecstasy received in Toronto newspapers.

This study's first research question involved assessing ecstasy-related reporting. A content analysis, based on one hundred and eighty three articles printed in the *Toronto Star*, *National Post* and *Globe and Mail* from 1988 through 2002, was conducted. Throughout this period, coverage was sporadic, except for the year 2000, during which ecstasy and raves were the subject of numerous articles. Rather than being located in the front section of the newspapers, articles were frequently found in less prominent parts. Approximately one quarter of the articles were accompanied by visual imagery, however, images were not always an accurate reflection of editorial content.

Research question two dealt with the construction of the "ecstasy problem" (descriptions of ecstasy, location of issues, topics covered, evidence used). Ecstasy was frequently portrayed as a dangerous substance, but in some noteworthy instances descriptions were positive and enticing. There was a tendency toward providing isolated information about the "ecstasy problem," making it appear Toronto was facing a unique crisis. Claims-makers reinforced this notion with messages such as Toronto had become

“the rave capital of North America and the capital of ecstasy consumption” (2 Feb 2000, *Toronto Star*). Drug officials from the U.S. were quick to criticize these claims, resulting in embarrassed retractions from claims-makers. Toronto did not face a unique crisis, and in fact, the rate of ecstasy use for the Toronto area actually decreased (from 7.3% in 1999 to 5.8% in 2001) when attention directed toward ecstasy was the most intense.

Nine dominant themes/topics emerged regarding the “ecstasy problem.” These themes/topics were: (1) a supposed societal view of ecstasy as a harmless drug; (2) the danger adulterants posed; (3) Toronto was facing a unique “ecstasy problem”; (4) an association with violence and guns; (5) the danger ecstasy laboratories posed to unsuspecting neighbours; (6) the possibility of sexual assault; (7) addiction; (8) the death of Allan Ho; and (9) the inquest into the death of Allan Ho. Examination of claims revealed these topics were either exaggerated or fabricated.

A review of “objective evidence” on which claims were based revealed that ecstasy never was, and continues not to be, a significant “social problem.” Ecstasy was, and still is, a niche drug. The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (2001) indicated the vast majority of students (93%) had never tried ecstasy, and 94% had not used it in the previous year. Of those who have tried ecstasy, 61% reported taking it only once or twice in the last year. Properties of the drug itself seem to contain its use. Frequent use produced unpleasant effects and an almost complete loss of desired effects. Therefore, although some individuals may frequently use ecstasy at first, they usually taper their use, or completely stop. Research findings regarding ecstasy were characterized by contradiction and uncertainty. Numerous limitations of these studies suggests there is little factual basis to validate the claims that surrounded ecstasy.

Research question three involved examining who was defining the “ecstasy problem.” Thirteen categories of claims-makers were identified: law enforcement officials, politicians, academics and researchers, ravers, harm reduction workers, the Mayor of Toronto, lawyers, rave promoters/club owners, the Chief of police, DJ’s, an Ontario coroner, ecstasy users other than ravers, and others who did not fit into the preceding categories. Law enforcement officials were found to be the primary definers of the problem, being quoted in more than a quarter of newspaper articles examined. Surprisingly, commentary from those who used ecstasy was seldom included in articles.

Research question four was intended to provide a general description of ecstasy users as reported by Toronto newspapers. From these reports, ecstasy users were primarily white, male ravers, with a mean age of twenty-four years. In the latter stages of coverage, newspapers emphasized use among older, professional individuals.

The recent uproar over ecstasy in Toronto can be classified as a moral panic. In fact, during the Allan Ho inquest Philip Jenkins, a professor who had written about moral panics, was called upon to explain the concept. Outside the hearing building, Jenkins elaborated his impressions and said that the reaction to ecstasy and raves in Toronto is a “classic moral panic” and Chief Fantino is “very active as the entrepreneur” (24 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*). From this perspective, certain moral entrepreneurs put forth simplistic, anti-ecstasy messages that are not supported by “objective” evidence.

The argument that Toronto witnessed a moral panic over ecstasy is substantiated by the use of Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (1994:156-158) five criteria of a moral panic: a heightened level of concern, increased hostility toward the people engaging in the activity, consensus that the threat was real, disproportionality of concern relative to the

nature of the threat and volatility of attention. Judging by the amount of newspaper coverage and political activity, it is safe to say concern was aroused over ecstasy and raves. One hundred and eighty-three newspaper articles were printed on the subject, Toronto city-bylaws changed, a Bill put before the House of Commons, numerous seminars conducted and educational videos were created among other activities. Increased hostility toward ravers is evident, as newspaper photographs and commentary created a division between "them" and "us." As with the Mods and Rockers of the 1960's, claims-makers sought ways to condemn and control these latter-day "folk devils" (Merchant and MacDonald, 1994). A consensus exists among a certain segment of society, although the extent of this is unknown, that the threat ecstasy and raves posed is real. Editorials written by Toronto residents make it clear that some are deeply troubled by this issue. Disproportionality of concern is evident throughout the media coverage, as exaggerated fears and misused evidence are evident. Generalizations like 80% of ravers are on drugs seem like a pretty strong anti-ecstasy argument until it becomes evident that the numbers are made up. And finally, attention was volatile. Coverage intensely escalated in the summer of 2000 and abruptly fell to almost nothing a few months later.

Although the reaction to ecstasy and raves in Toronto fits the criteria of a classic moral panic outlined by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), I experienced two difficulties rooted in the way moral panics and the role of the media have been theorized. The first difficulty of moral panic theory I experienced is the lack of criteria to determine if attention is volatile. Volatility implies a sudden eruption of concern, and nearly as suddenly, a decline in concern. Clearly, the banning of city sanctioned raves and the inquest into the death of Allan Ho are the two key events fueling coverage and triggering

the “moral panic.” However, as previous headlines “Danger Parties” (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*) and “The Agony over Ecstasy” (9 October 1993, *Globe and Mail*) indicate, the themes during the summer of 2000 are largely a replay of past stories. As long ago as 1988 (30 November 1988, *Toronto Star*), journalists were warning about ecstasy and rave culture. Therefore, it could be argued that newspaper coverage of ecstasy does not fulfill all of Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (1994) criteria of a moral panic.

A second difficulty of various moral panic theorists, such as Cohen (1972/1980) and Hall (1978), is their tendency to overstate hegemony and overlook counter-discourses (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995:564). Moral panic studies have traditionally ignored how “folk devils” can and do fight back (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995:566). “Folk devils” have been able to contest the traditional moral guardians and even produce their own media accounts to counter what they perceive as biased treatment by mainstream media (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995:567-568).

Constructionist studies, unlike moral panic studies, commonly focus on attempts to re (construct) reality by those impacted through claims-making. One does not need to turn to constructionist studies or sociology journals to find divergences of opinion regarding the “ecstasy panic.” Certain media workers recognize that not all claims about ecstasy carry the same validity. Donna Laframboise, a *National Post* reporter, attended a rave to see if they are “threatening the very fabric of Canadian society” as Chief Fantino suggested (16 May 2000, *National Post*). Instead of finding rampant ecstasy use at this rave, the only detectable drugs were marijuana and those of the legal variety, alcohol and tobacco. In Laframboise’s view, it is “not clear how Chief Fantino’s claims that most people attending raves are high on drugs can even begin to be substantiated” (16 May

2000, *National Post*). “How can he tell they’re not drunk?” she wondered. Laframboise also found it an exaggeration to say that the majority of ravers were under sixteen as Chief Fantino implied. *Toronto Star* columnist Dave Bidini went one step further and actually took “the fad drug” ecstasy. According to Bidini, ecstasy is so gentle that it “failed to live up to the hype” and “left him without a social drug to stand behind” (17 July 1993, *Toronto Star*).

During the peak of newspaper coverage on ecstasy, some news stories and editorials began to frame claims as rhetoric and the “ecstasy epidemic” as hype.<sup>18</sup> Articles such as “Government rants while kids rave” (8 November 1999, *National Post*), “Afraid of rave? Remember rock?” (19 April 2000, *National Post*), “Don’t sweat the new stone-age” (9 April 1998, *Toronto Star*), “I’m sick of rants about raves” (25 March 2000, *Toronto Star*) and “Ecstasy’s over but booze bounces back” (26 August 2000, *Toronto Star*) recognize parallels between the political environment of claims-making activity about ecstasy and earlier “drug problems” (e.g. opium in the early 1900’s, marijuana in the 1930’s and 1940’s, LSD in the 1960’s and crack in the 1980’s). These journalists caution readers to be critical of facts and figures that are presented to them. For example, the author of “Rave On” noted, “Granted, raves are not garden parties. But let’s keep some perspective” (4 August 2000, *National Post*). *National Post* journalist, Mitchell Raphael wrote

Accidental deaths of any kind are a cause for concern, but it’s worth putting this statistic into perspective. According to Health Canada (1997) 1680 people are

---

<sup>18</sup> In one instance this critical reporting provoked an angered response from Dr. Steven Kish who felt it contributed to the view that ecstasy was harmless. “Newspaper columnists at the *Globe and Mail* who feel taking ecstasy is a human rights issue don’t help. It’s not the same thing as drinking alcohol. Taking ecstasy can kill you” he complained. (28 June 2000, *Globe and Mail*)

killed each year in alcohol related car crashes. For 2000, Health Canada projects that smoking-attributed deaths will total 46,910. According to the Canadian Council of Snowmobile Organizations, on average over the last five years in Canada, approximately 95 snowmobilers have lost their lives while snowmobiling. And snowmobiling is a leisure activity people choose to do for fun- kind of like going to a rave (19 April 2000, *National Post*).

Another reporter, Betsy Powell, made a similar assertion “there’s lots of other snorting and swallowing going on. For instance, in 1997, there were 62 deaths related directly to ingesting cocaine, 70 related to heroin, while alcoholic poisoning killed 44 people” (7 May 2000, *Toronto Star*).

Some reporters turned their criticism toward other media sources for their depiction of raves and ecstasy. Upset with what he regarded as “myopic coverage,” Mitchell Raphael wrote

Aside from myself at the *National Post* and The *Toronto Star*’s Ben Rayner, the positive cultural aspects of raves are virtually ignored by mainstream Toronto press, which served up such headlines as “A deathwatch on raves, courtesy of The *Globe and Mail* and “Young clubbers ecstatic about rave chemicals in The *Toronto Sun*. The worst was Ian Brown’s “Adventures in clubland”, a September *Toronto Life* cover story that painted Toronto as a drugged-out wasteland with no mention of it being a huge North American centre for top international DJ’s (8 November 1999, *National Post*).

In another reflexive article, Raphael commented about the *Maclean*’s cover story, “Rave Fever.”

*Macleans*’ has regurgitated the same story that seems to be told in the media every month-kids, partying, drugs, danger-without giving the meat about what keeps driving this important youth movement. This is a culture growing by leaps and bounds and it should be covered with critical, artistic and sociological



analysis, not just with alarmist headlines and glossed-over content. (19 April 2000, *National Post*)

Raphael felt *Maclean's* journalists failure to interview founders of the rave scene and major promoters is an "egregious offense" comparable to "doing a feature about a federal cabinet minister and talking to the guy who mops their floor, a few secretaries, a friend of a friend and an outside "expert" observer or two" (19 April 2000, *National Post*). Such treatment prompted Raphael to ask, "There are thousands of fascinating stories in the rave scene, some dark, some bright. Isn't it time journalists starting treating it the same way they do rock concerts and pop acts? How many more trees have to die in the name of newsprint before they get around to it?" (19 April 2000, *National Post*).

The *Macleans'* story on ecstasy and raving appears quite similar to the magazine's five part series on the Canadian drug trade published in 1920 (Murphy, February 15 1920). Even the title "Rave Fever: Kids love those all night parties but the drugs can kill" (Oh, 2000) is reminiscent of "The Grave Drug Menace" (Murphy, 1920). The vivid warnings of the dangers posed by ecstasy in *Maclean's* (2000) shares a similar provocative writing style with the 1920 series. A blend of statistics, moral anecdotes and sensational language is evident in both accounts. Murphy (1920) described the traffic in illicit drugs as having grown to "menacing proportions." Similarly, Oh (2000) claims that trafficking in ecstasy has become a "virtual epidemic" (40). While the 1920 series contained an image of the grim reaper, the 2000 article describes ecstasy fatalities at raves as "a new way of dying" (Oh, 2000:41). The constructed nature of drug panics is well illustrated by the similarity of claims-making in these two instances. The drug

involved in the panic may be new (or previously relatively unknown as in the case of ecstasy) but the rhetoric is timeless.

*Toronto Star*'s Ben Rayner had a similar mindset as Mitchell Raphael. He complained how sick he was of "rants about raves" (25 March 2000, *Toronto Star*). In his view, Toronto is full of "loudmouth sloganeering from soundbite-addicted cops and politicians, and the faithful, if typically uninformed and miscontextualized reproduction thereof by local media" (25 March 2000, *Toronto Star*). Rayner claimed the city's newspapers have contributed to a witch-hunt mentality by using headlines about "killer clubs" and making reference to "years of murder and mayhem in after-hours clubs" (25 March 2000, *Toronto Star*). Rayner reports feeling that most of the reporting "hammers home yet again how infuriatingly little understanding most of the mainstream media here have of the scene" (25 March 2000, *Toronto Star*). According to the columnist, the rave scene is portrayed in Toronto papers as "mass orgies of sin where kids wade, blank-eyed, through piles of filth, permanently brain-damaged by "pulsating music" and preyed upon by dark overlords hell-bent on hooking them on drugs" (25 March 2000, *Toronto Star*).

It is my position that there are reasons other than "objective indicators" as to why ecstasy became a demon drug in Toronto. Various scholarly studies as well as media exposes have implied previous "drug scares" were a reaction to political and racial issues rather than to drugs themselves (Beckett and Sasson, 1998; Covington, 1997; Gozenbach, 1996; Hartman and Golub, 1999; Hollywood, 1997; Jenkins, 1999; Reinerman and Levine, 1995). Perhaps this criticism made claims-makers more cautious in their selection of substances to focus on. Ecstasy may have been condemned so ferociously because it is thought to be a politically safe target. Although the primary consumers of

ecstasy (the rave community) are demographically similar to the hippies of the 1960's (predominantly white, middle class youth) there are significant differences between the two groups. Unlike the extroverted politics and public lifestyle displays of hippies, ravers largely attempt to remain hidden from outsiders and avoid political debate.

Whereas hippie ideology was a way of life, raving is primarily a weekend activity. As a group, ecstasy-using ravers are *believed* to be somewhat apolitical and too dispersed to defend themselves (McCall, 2001:143-149; Fritz, 1999:195). Rave culture is thought to be fundamentally amnesiac and nonverbal. No inciting words are present in their music. Few issues, beyond such obvious and uncontentious ones as anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-homophobia have been addressed by rave music. With the exception of the basically faceless DJ, there is an absence of leader figures in their community. In general, police and politicians likely thought rave culture could not politicize or empower its' members. The main goal of raving, after all, is simply to have a good time dancing.

Frustrated with the city's media, police and mayor for spreading misinformation, the rave community rallied around their scene and engaged in various political actions. Likely to the surprise of police and politicians, the apolitical pastime of raving quickly became political. Toronto ravers might not be hippies reincarnated but are "more than ready to flex their muscle in order to change the world they live in" (26 July 2000, *National Post*). According to Will Chang, the spokesperson for the Toronto Dance Safe Committee, "We want to show the powers that be that even though people involved in the rave scene really don't want to get political, if our culture is being threatened by a lot of misinformation, we can and will be a strong political force" (26 July 2000, *National Post*). Just how much of a force followers of the rave scene are was demonstrated when

thousands danced and rallied at City Hall as part of a campaign to persuade the politicians to lift the suspension on raves (Hier, 2002:51). Other political action by Toronto ravers includes raising a \$20,000 “war chest” to hire legal representation for the coroner’s inquest into the death of Allan Ho (27 April 2000, *National Post*) and creating a novelty CD featuring the Mayor’s verbal flip-flops concerning raves (25 July 2000, *National Post*). As it turned out, the rave community is not the easy target claims-makers likely expected.

Another reason for the attack on ecstasy might be because it is an easy way to justify police budgets. Police continually need to validate their existence. Figures about a “drug problem” are a relatively easy method of doing so.<sup>19</sup> Considering each pill is valued at around \$30 (18 May 2000, *Globe and Mail*), it does not take much to make the “ecstasy problem” seem out of control and arrests of those trafficking or manufacturing ecstasy look like great feats of police work. The local nature of ecstasy production seemed to justify extreme police intervention more so than a drug produced in some far off distant country. Since ecstasy is produced locally the police could “smash” drug rings and arrest drug dealing “kingpins” without ever having to leave the city limits. Articles describing raided labs and arrested manufacturers cast doubt on the sophistication of Toronto’s ecstasy production. Labs were portrayed as being run by inexperienced people working from recipes off the Internet. The independent nature of production suggests claims-makers overemphasized the role of organized crime and the scope of the ecstasy

---

<sup>19</sup> For an in depth examination of this topic see Becker (1963). Becker (1963) illustrated how the American Bureau of Narcotics waged a campaign to criminalize marijuana in the 1930’s in an attempt to rescue itself from a decreasing budget.

“epidemic.” Included among the “drug lords” arrested were a university professor, a chiropractor and an assortment of university students.

It is quite possible that claims-makers attacked ecstasy for self-serving reasons. Perhaps Chief Fantino, whom I have argued is the key claims-maker in the “ecstasy panic,” was moved by a sincere and unwavering belief that ecstasy was harmful. However it is also possible that a more self-interested reason drove him to action. Some journalists believe Fantino may have aspirations to hold a political office. In a similar historical example, claims-making about opium enhanced Mackenzie King’s reputation as a social reformer and was arguably one of the factors responsible for him becoming Prime Minister (Solomon and Madison, 1977:246). Rumours have been circulating that Fantino has been building a profile as Toronto’s chief of police in order to make a run at provincial or federal politics when he tires of the job (13 May 2000, *National Post*). Cracking down on raves might be a way of gaining some political visibility as a crime fighter. As one City Councillor, begging anonymity, responded, “Listen to his pronouncements. He’s talking about rewriting by-laws. As if the police ever write law. He’s poaching our territory” (24 February 2001, *Toronto Star*). Another Councillor noted, “he’s trying to set social policy. That’s not the purview of the police. Politicians are elected to do that” (13 May 2000, *National Post*). Others believed Fantino was being groomed for the seats of Solicitor-General or Attorney-General (24 February 2001, *Toronto Star*). The Chief denied these suggestions, but with a little bit of wiggle room. “The only thing you can rule out is the immediate. I’m flattered, but I have no such aspirations. I love my job,” said Fantino (24 February 2001, *Toronto Star*).

Anxieties about the immorality of youth, the absence of parental control and too much free time are not new. Panics over endangered youth have occurred with startling regularity. Recent stories about the dangers of ecstasy, consumed at late night parties far from adult supervision, revisited these themes. Ecstasy using ravers became a symbolic representation of the downward spiral of today's youth. It is quite possible that ecstasy serves as a justification for the policing of youth in the rave scene. Rhetoric of fighting ecstasy abuse seems to be the point of entry for surveillance and control (Linder, 2001). In the article "Danger Parties" (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*), Parent Watch, an organization developed to "find solutions to teen problems" urges parents "to be wary." If a teen "starts sleeping over at a friend's house a lot, but doesn't leave a phone number and forgets a toothbrush, or uses makeup to conceal tired eyes, she may be going to a rave" (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*). It is recommended that parents "start looking for signs like their kids leaving for the night with knapsacks, or an interest in the Internet on Thursday or Friday" (22 March 1997, *Toronto Star*). Military-style inspections are promoted. The article encouraged parents to "do bed checks in the middle of the night, check coat pockets for rave flyers and become educated about raves and the dangers associated with them." The article, "How to spot an ecstasy user" (29 June 1999, *Globe and Mail*), offers a more visible sign for parents to look for. Apparently, "a rash that looks like acne" can possibly identify people who have used ecstasy.

Sociological implications of ecstasy use, rather than medical implications appear to account for concern among some individuals. Concern that scientifically created drugs will remove ideas and aspirations that are fundamental to humanity is not new. In the classic literary example, "*Brave New World*" (Huxley, 1946), the wonder-drug Soma

could have easily been ecstasy. It is claimed both drugs can provide instant pleasure on demand with minimal side effects. Huxley's phrase "take a holiday from reality whenever you like, and come back without so much as a headache" is echoed in newspaper accounts that describe ecstasy as a "mini vacation" (25 March 2000, *Globe and Mail*). Fear of lowered aspiration is evident regarding ecstasy. According to the *Toronto Star* (20 November 1999), "Ecstasy is an artificial high, so the rest of your natural highs start losing their taste somewhat." It is claimed ecstasy "shifts the paradigm of what happiness is. So there's a lot of really jaded 18 year olds out there who have experienced the mountaintop-they've been to Everest on ecstasy-so what the hell is a new boyfriend or girlfriend or an A on that English paper? Like they care" (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). Furthermore, it is claimed ecstasy "jades people, or insulates them from natural happiness" (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*). This "perversion of happiness" (20 November 1999, *Toronto Star*) makes ecstasy seem uniquely sinister. When ecstasy is combined with the rave experience, the prediction is even more dire. One commentary in the *Toronto Star* (3 August 2000) issues the following warning: "The rave experience can be such a psychological overload, such an overstimulation of the senses, can we understand the effects this will have on our society?"

A more far-fetched, but still somewhat believable, partial explanation for ecstasy being chosen as a "demon drug" is that it provides unwanted competition for a socially acceptable "medicine." The intrinsic difference between ecstasy and Prozac is not clear-cut (Jenkins, 1999:3). Both drugs work in a similar manner by inhibiting the re-uptake of serotonin making users calmer and more confident (Jenkins, 1999:90; Joseph, 2000:47; *Economist*:87). In theory Prozac is to be prescribed for clinical depression but in practice

people often receive it simply because they want it (Economist, 1996:87). In other words, Prozac is used recreationally to enhance pleasure in much the same way as ecstasy. As with ecstasy, Prozac has a negative side. Users experience nausea, diarrhea, sexual dysfunction and some have suffered fatal consequences when combined with other drugs (Nichols, 1994:36). Controversial claims have also linked Prozac to violence and suicide (Nichols, 1994:36). Eli Lilly, the manufacturer of Prozac, however, has largely been successful in downplaying such instances of Prozac's side effects. One cannot help but wonder why Prozac rose to giant commercial success while ecstasy became a "demon drug." It is not beyond reason that corporate influence convinced key players to crack down on ecstasy because it has become a threat to Prozac's market-share.



## REFERENCES

- Adlaf, Edward M and Reginald Smart. (1997). "Party Subcultures or Dens of Doom? An Epidemiological Study of Rave Attendance and Drug Use Patterns Among Adolescent Students." *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 29 (2): 193-198.
- Adlaf, Edward M., Frank J. Ivis and Reginald G. Smart. (2001). *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey 1977-2001*. Toronto: The Addiction Research Foundation.
- Agger, Ben. (1993). "The Problem with Social Problems: From Social Constructionism to Critical Theory." In J. Holstein and G. Miller's (ed.) *Reconsidering Social Constructionism: Debates in Social Problems Theory*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Beck, Jerome and Marsha Rosenbaum. (1994). *Pursuit Of Ecstasy*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Beck, Jerome and Marsha Rosenbaum. (1990). "The Scheduling of MDMA ("Ecstasy")." In J. Inciardi's (ed.) *Handbook of Drug Control in the United States*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Becker, Howard. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies In The Sociology Of Deviance*. New York: Press: New York.
- Becker, Howard (1967). "Whose Side Are We On?" *Social Problems*, 14: 239-247.
- Beckett, Katherine and Theodore Sasson. (1998). "The Media and the Construction of the Drug Crisis in America." In E. Jensen and J. Gerber's (ed.) *The New War on Drugs: Symbolic Politics and Criminal Justice Policy*. Ohio: Anderson Publishing Company.
- Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. (1986). "The Sociology Of Moral Panics: Toward A New Synthesis." *The Sociological Quarterly* 27 (4): 495-513.
- Berg, Bruce L. (1998). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. (1966). *The Social Construction Of Reality*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Best, Joel. (1987). "Rhetoric in claims-making: Constructing the missing children problem." *Social Problems* 34 (2): 101-121.
- Best, Joel. (1993). "But Seriously Folks: The Limitations of the Strict Constructionist Interpretation of Social Problems." In J. Holstein and G. Miller's (ed.) *Reconsidering Social Constructionism: Debates in Social Problems Theory*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

- Best, Joel. (1995). *Images of Issues*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Best, Joel. (2001a). *Damned Lies And Statistics*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Best, Joel. (2001b). *How Claims Spread: Cross National Diffusion of Social Problems*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Blumer, Herbert. (1971). "Social Problems as Collective Behaviour." *Social Problems* 18: 298:306.
- Bonnie, R. and C. Whitebread. (1974). *The Marijuana Connection*. Virginia: University of Virginia.
- Burningham, Kate and Geoff Cooper. (1999). "Being Constructive: Social Constructionism And The Environment." *Sociology* 33 (2): 297-316.
- Cloud, John. (2000). "The Lure of Ecstasy." *Time*, Monday June 5.
- Cohen, Richard. (1994). *The Love Drug: Marching to the Beat of Ecstasy* New York: The Haworth Press.
- Cohen, Stanley. (1972/1980). *Folk Devils And Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Collin, Matthew. (1997). *Altered State: The Story of Ecstasy Culture and Acid House*. London: Serpent's Tail.
- Concar, David and Claire Ainsworth. (2002). "Ecstasy and the Brain." *New Scientist*, April 20.
- Cook, Shirley J. (1969). "Canadian Narcotics Legislation, 1908-1923: A Conflict Model Interpretation." *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 6 (1): 36-46.
- Covington, Jeanette. (1997). "The Social Construction Of the Minority Drug Problem." *Social Justice* 24 (4): 117-144.
- Croft, R.C., A.J. Macay, D. Mills and J.G.H. Gruzelier. (2001). "The relative contributions of ecstasy and cannabis to cognitive impairment." *Psychopharmacology* 15: 373-379.
- Eisner, Bruce. (1994). *Ecstasy: The MDMA Story*. California: Ronin Publishing.
- Fritz, Jimi. (1999). *Rave Culture: An Insider's Overview*. Canada: Smallfry Press.

Gonzenbach, William. (1996). *The Media, The President, And Public Opinion: A longitudinal analysis of the drug issue, 1984-1991*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.

Goode, Erich. (1990). "The American Drug Panic of the 1980's: Social Construction or Objective Threat?" *The International Journal of the Addictions* 25 (9): 1083-1098.

Goode, Erich and Nachman Ben-Yehuda. (1994). *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. Cambridge MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Gouzoulis-Mayfrank, Euphrosyne, Jorg Daumann, Frank Tuchtenhagen, Susanne Pelz, Steffanie Becker, Hans-Jurgen Kunert, Bruno Fimm, Henning Sass. (2000). "Impaired cognitive performance in drug free users of recreational ecstasy (MDMA)." *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry* 68: 719-725.

Green, Melvyn. (1979). "A History of Canadian Narcotics Control." In N. Boyd's (1986) (ed.) *The Social Dimensions of Law*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.

Gusfield, Joseph R. (1963). *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*. United States of America: University of Illinois Press.

Gusfield, Joseph R. (1981). *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hall, Stuart, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts. (1978). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan.

Hammersley, Richard, Furzana Khan and Jason Ditton. (2002). *Ecstasy And The Rise Of The Chemical Generation*. New York: Routledge.

Hansard. May 18 2000. Retrieved June 1, 2002 from <http://www.ontla.on.ca/hansard/house-debates/37-parl/session1/L061.html>.

Harder, Jeff. (1999). "Real life sneaks into Legislature" in *CNEWS*. Retrieved June 1, 2002 from <http://www.canoe.ca/CNEWSPolitics9912/31-harder.html>.

Hartman, Donna M. and Andrew Golub. (1999). "The Social Construction of the Crack Epidemic in the Print Media." *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 31 (4): 423-431.

Hier, Sean P. (2002). "Raves, Risks and the Ecstasy Panic: A Case Study in the Subversive Nature of Moral Regulation." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 27 (1): 33-57.

Holland, Julie. (2001). *Ecstasy: The Complete Guide-A Comprehensive Look At The Risks And Benefits Of MDMA*. Vermont: Park Street Press.

Hollywood, Brian. (1997). "Dancing in the Dark: Ecstasy, the Dance Culture, and Moral Panic in Post Ceasefire Northern Ireland." *Critical Criminology* 8( 1): 62-77.

- Holstein, James A. and Gale Miller. (1993). "Reconstituting the Constructionist Program." In J. Holstein and G. Miller's (ed.) *Reconsidering Social Constructionism: Debates in Social Problems Theory*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Holsti, Ole. (1969). *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Howell, David C. (1995). *Fundamental Statistics For The Behavioral Sciences*. California: Duxbury Press.
- Hunt, Alan. (1999). "The Purity Wars: Making sense of moral militancy." *Theoretical Criminology* 3 (4): 409-436.
- Hutson, Scott R. (2000). "The Rave: Spiritual Healing In Modern Western Subcultures." *Anthropological Quarterly* 73 (1): 35-49.
- Huxley, Aldous. (1946). *Brave New World* New York: HarperCollins Publishers Limited.
- Jenkins, Philip. (1992). *Intimate Enemies: Moral Panics in Contemporary Great Britain*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Jenkins, Philip. (1999). *Synthetic Panics: The Symbolic Politics of Designer Drugs*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jensen, Eric L. and Jurg Gerber. (1998). *The New War on Drugs: Symbolic Politics and Criminal Justice Policy*. Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing Company.
- Johnson, John M. (1989). "Horror Stories and the Construction of Child Abuse." In J. Best's (ed.) *Images of Issues*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Joseph, Miriam. (2000). *Ecstasy: It's History and Lore*. London: Carlton Books.
- Kish, Stephen, Y. Furukawa, C. Ang, P. Vorce and K.S. Kalasinsky. (2000). "Stratial serotonin is depleted in brain of a human MDMA (Ecstasy) user." *Neurology* 55: 294-296.
- Linder, Meadow J. (2001). "The Agony and the Ecstasy: Raving Youth." Retrieved June 1, 2002 from <http://www.tryoung.com/journal-grad.html/4Shon/linder.html>.
- Lippert, Randy. (1990). "The construction of Satanism as a social problem in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 15 (4): 417-440.
- Luckman, Susan. (1998). "Rave Cultures And The Academy." *Social Alternatives* 17 (4): 45-50.

MacCoun, Robert J., James P. Kahan, James Gillespie, and Jeeyang Rhee. (1993). "A Content Analysis Of The Drug Legalization Debate." *The Journal of Drug Issues* 23 (4): 615-629.

McCall, Tara. (2001). *This Is Not A Rave: In the Shadow of a Subculture*. Toronto: Insomniac Press.

McElrath, Karen and Kieran McEvoy. (2001). "Fact, Fiction, And Function: Mythmaking And The Social Construction Of Ecstasy Use." *Substance Use and Misuse* 36 (1&2): 1-22.

McRobbie, Angela and Sarah L. Thornton. (1995). "Rethinking "Moral Panic" for Multi-mediated Social Worlds." *The British Journal of Sociology* 46 (4): 559-574.

Miller, Gale. (1993). "New Challenges to Social Constructionism: Alternative Perspectives on Social Problems Theory." In J. Holstein and G. Miller's (eds.) *Reconsidering Social Constructionism: Debates in Social Problems Theory*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Miller, Gale and James A. Holstein. (1993). "Social Constructionism and Its Critics: Assessing Recent Challenges." In J. Holstein and G. Miller's (eds.) *Reconsidering Social Constructionism: Debates in Social Problems Theory*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Miller, Leslie J. (1993). "Claims-Making from the Underside: Marginalization and Social Problems Analysis." In G. Miller and J. Holstein's (eds.) *Constructionist Controversies: Issues in Social Problems Theory*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

Moore, Dawn. (2000). "Risking Saturday Night: Regulating student alcohol use through 'common sense'." *Theoretical Criminology* 4 (4): 411-428.

Moore, Dawn and Mariana Valverde. (2000). "Maidens at risk: 'date rape drugs' and the formulation of hybrid risk knowledges." *Economy and Society* 29 (4): 514-531.

Murphy, Emily F. (1920). "The Grave Drug Menace." *Maclean's Magazine*, February 15: 9-11.

Neuman, Lawrence W. (1997). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Nichols, Marks. (1994). "Questioning Prozac." *Maclean's*, May 23: 36-41.

Oh, Susan. (2000). "Rave Fever." *Maclean's*, April 24: 39-45.

O'Mahoney, Bernard. (1997). *So This Is Ecstasy?* London: Mainstream Pub Co Limited.

- Orcutt, James D. and Blake J. Turner. (1993). "Shocking Numbers and Graphic Accounts: Quantified Images of Drug Problems in the Print Media." *Social Problems* 40 (2): 190-206.
- Pfohl, Stephen J. (1977). "The "Discovery" of Child Abuse." In H. Pontell (ed.) *Social Deviance: Readings in Theory and Research*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Pfuhl, Edwin. (1980). *The Deviance Process*. New York: Van Nostrand Company.
- Pini, Maria. (2001). *Club Cultures and Female Subjectivity: The Move from Home to House*. Australia: Palgrave.
- Quinney, R.A. (1970). *The Social Reality of Crime*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Redhead, Steve. (1990). *The End of the Century Party*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Redhead, Steve. (1993). *Rave Off: Politics And Deviance In Contemporary Youth Culture*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Reeves, Jimmie L. and Richard Campbell. (1994). *Cracked Coverage: Television News, The Anti-Cocaine Crusade, And The Reagan Legacy*. United States: Duke University Press.
- Reinarman, Craig and Harry G. Levine. (1995). "The Crack Attack: Politics and Media in America's Latest Drug Scare" in J. Best's (ed.) *Images of Issues*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Riffe, Daniel, Stephen Lacy, and Frederick G. Fico. (1998). *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Roberts, J. and A. Doob. (1990). "News Media Influence on Public Views on Sentencing." *Law and Human Behavior* 14: 451-468.
- Sasson, T. (1995). *Crime Talk: How Citizen's Construct a Social Problem*. New York: Adline de Gruyter.
- Saunders, Nicholas. (1995). *Ecstasy And The Dance Culture*. England: Nicholas Saunders.
- Silcott, Mireille. (1999). *Rave America: New School Dancescapes*. Toronto: ECW Press.
- Silcott, Mireille and Push. (2000). *The book of e: all about ecstasy*. London: Omnibus Press.

- Smith, Vern. (2000a). "Rave fears fuelled by dubious ecstasy stats." in *Eye Weekly*. Retrieved June 1, 2002 from [http://www.eyenet.net/issue/issue\\_03.23.00/news/e.html](http://www.eyenet.net/issue/issue_03.23.00/news/e.html).
- Smith, Vern. (2000b). "Fantino's fantasy gun bust." in *Eye Weekly*. Retrieved June 1, 2002 from.
- Solomon, Robert and T. Madison. (1977). "The Evolution of Non-Medical Opiate Use In Canada – Part I 1870 – 1929." *Drug Forum* 5 (3): 237-265.
- Solomon, Robert. (1977). "The Evolution Of Non-Medical Opiate Use In Canada – Part II: 1930 – 1970." *Drug Forum* 6 (1): 1-25.
- Spruit, Inge P. (1999). "Ecstasy Use And Policy Responses In The Netherlands." *Journal Of Drug Issues* 29 (3): 653-678.
- Spector, Malcolm and John I. Kitsuse. (1977). *Constructing Social Problems*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Strauss, A.L. (1987). *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, Kenneth. (1998). *Moral Panics*. New York: Routledge.
- Tomlinson, Lori. (1998). "This Ain't No Disco... Or Is It? Youth Culture And The Rave Phenomenon." In J. Epstein's (ed.) *Youth Culture: Identity In A Postmodern World* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Troyer, Vern. (1989). "The Surprising Resurgence of the Smoking Problem." In J. Best's (ed.) *Images of Issues*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Ungar, Sheldon. (2001). "Moral Panic Versus the Risk Society: The Implications of the Changing Sites of Social Anxiety." *British Journal of Sociology* 52 (2): 271-292.
- Waddington, P.A.J. (1986). "Mugging as a moral panic: a question of proportion." *The British Journal of Sociology* 37(2): 245-259.
- Weber, Robert Philip. (1985). *Basic Content Analysis*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Weber, Timothy R. (1999). "Raving in Toronto: Peace, Love, Unity and Respect in Transition." *Journal of Youth Studies* 2(3): 317-336.
- Wijngaart, Van De, Ruud Braam, Dick De Bruin, Marjolein Fris, N.J.M. Maalste and H.T. Verbraeck. (1999). "Ecstasy Use At Large-Scale Dance Events In The Netherlands." *Journal of Drug Issues* 29(3): 679-702.

Woolgar, Steve and Dorothy Pawluch. (1985). "Ontological Gerrymandering: The Anatomy Of Social Problems Explanations." *Social Problems* 32(3): 214-226.



## NEWSPAPER REFERENCES

Abbate, Gay. "Fantino wants ban on raves at Exhibition Place." *Globe and Mail*. April 29, 2000.

"Canada: Legalize designer rave drug, author urges inquest." *Globe and Mail*. May 24, 2000.

"Raves should be allowed, city committee urges." *Globe and Mail*. July 14, 2000.

Abbate, Gay and Roma Luciw. "Ravers scoff at police request for broader powers." *Globe and Mail*. May 26, 2000.

Abbate, Gay and Ravi Ubha. "Ravers rally on eve before council vote." *Globe and Mail*. August 2, 2000.

Akin, David. "Johnny be rich." *National Post*. January 15, 2000.

Alcoba, Natalie. "Charges laid in teen's death at café." *Toronto Star*. December 5, 2001.

Allan, Michael. "Balance missing from article on ecstasy." *Toronto Star*. December 13, 2001.

Alphonso, Caroline. "Police got math wrong; record breaking seizure of ecstasy not so big after all." *Globe and Mail*. June 3, 2000.

"Experts know little of ecstasy, jury hears." *Globe and Mail*. May 10, 2000.

"Fight drug use and not raves, father, daughter tell inquest." *Globe and Mail*. May 20, 2000.

Appleby, Timothy and Natalie Southworth. "RCMP seize \$5 million worth of rave drug." *Globe and Mail*. May 18, 2000.

Appleby, Timothy, Colin Freeze, Natalie Southworth and Roma Luciw. "The story of E." *Globe and Mail*. May 27, 2000.

Armstrong, Jane. "Two dead after rave in Vancouver." *Globe and Mail*. October 30, 2001.

Armstrong, Natalie. "Despite recent deaths, Ecstasy is becoming more popular in this country, and police seize largest haul." *National Post*. June 1, 2000.

Avni, Sheerly. "Ecstasy on the couch." *Toronto Star*. October 12, 2002.

Azam, Sharlene. "Teenagers are cogs in wheel of drug trade." *Toronto Star*. February 15, 2000.

Balon, Emily. "Mayor Mel, come rave with me-wear funky pink fuzzy pants." *Toronto Star*. May 23, 2000.

Bell, Stewart. "Easy access to chemicals fuels drug trade." National Post. January 20, 2001.

Bell, Stewart and Adrian Humphreys. "Strip mall 'pharmacy' proves short-lived business venture." National Post. May 6, 1999.

Bell, Udy. "Ecstasy death was wake up call for raver." National Post. July 24, 2000.

Benzie, Robert. "City council expected to lift ban on raves." National Post. August 3, 2000.

"Raves will be allowed again on city property." National Post. August 4, 2000.

Bidini, Dave. "It's high time to find another drug of choice." Toronto Star. July 17, 1993.

Black, Shannon. "Profits and protocol take place of peace, love." National Post. December 15, 1999.

Blackwell, Tom. "Party divide: MPPs either view rave bill as saviour or killjoy." National Post. May 19, 2000.

"Undercover MPP who slipped into a rave produces video spelling out the evils of party-drug Ecstasy." National Post. April 20, 2000.

Bragg, Rebecca. "Police say raves can't be stopped." Toronto Star. November 2, 1999.

Brazao, Dale. "Hosting raves won't address a host of issues." Toronto Star. August 8, 2000.

Brennan, Richard. "It's no party: Crackdown looms on all-night raves." Toronto Star. November 4, 1999.

Brent, Paul. "Ad agency infiltrates rave scene to target 'cynical' teens." National Post. October 4, 1999.

Brown, Desmond. "Young raver's death blamed on Ecstasy drug." National Post. June 28, 2000.

Courvoisier, Guy. "Young people's safety should be priority at 'Rave' parties." Toronto Star. June 30, 1996.

Coyle, Jim. "Don't sweat the new stone age." Toronto Star. April 9, 1998.

Cudmore, James. "Rave drug GHB doesn't mix well." National Post. March 9, 1999.

Curry, Glenn. "Drug's aren't the problem." Toronto Star. December 4, 2001.

DeMara, Bruce and Paul Maloney. "Council votes to suspend raves." Toronto Star. May 11, 2000.

Dow, Julia. "Ecstasy can scramble brain chemicals." Toronto Star. September 7, 1999.

Eby, Chris. "\$11 M seizure of Ecstasy called largest in Canada." National Post. August 23, 2000.

"Crack down on raves, say officials." National Post. November 4, 1999.

"City is Ecstasy capital: police." National Post. March 15, 2000.

"Officer pleads guilty to armed robbery." National Post. February 22, 2001.

Edwards, Steven. "Study says ravers risk memory loss and other brain damage if they take ecstasy." National Post. November 2, 1998.

Elghawaby, Amira. "Ecstasy lab in Markham made 20,000 tabs a week: Chemist." Toronto Star. July 9, 2000.

"Analysis delayed in ecstasy bust." Toronto Star. July 10, 2000.

Elliott, Brendan. "13 year-old spurs rave changes." National Post. August 8, 2000.

Ellis, Colin. "I won't rave, don't ask me." Globe and Mail. July 14, 2000.

Evenson, Brad. "Brain of Ecstasy user shows alarming loss of vital chemical." National Post. July 25, 2000.

Ferenc, Leslie. "Raids uncover home drug labs." Toronto Star. April 12, 2001.

Fiorino, Danny. "Rave's don't kill people." Toronto Star. August 8, 2000.

Forsey, Richell. "Straight dope on drugs." Toronto Star. February 23, 1999.

Foss, Krista. "It can kill but no one knows how." Globe and Mail. May 27, 2000.

"Secret drug laboratories sprout up across Canada." Globe and Mail. May 29, 2000.

Freed, Dale Anne. "Police couldn't close 'firetrap' detective says." Toronto Star. May 11, 2000.

"Ecstasy use at raves problem, promoter admits." Toronto Star. May 12, 2000.

"Officer likes sound of new raves bill." Toronto Star. May 17, 2000.

"Parent wants raves banned." Toronto Star. May 18, 2000.

"Ravers need facts, inquest told." Toronto Star. May 19, 2000.

"Rave pamphlet like ad for ecstasy, inquest told." May 24, 2000.

"Rave rules urged as inquest wraps up." Toronto Star. May 26, 2000.

"Don't ban raves: Jury." Toronto Star. June 2, 2000.

"Teen bought ecstasy at club shortly before he died: Cousin." Toronto Star. July 10, 2001.

Gatehouse, Jonathon. "Hasidic Jews used as drug mules." National Post. January 26, 2001.

Gill, Alexandra. "The High Life." Globe and Mail. March 25, 2000.

Gollom, Mark. "Ravers rally to defend dances." National Post. August 2, 2000.  
 "Police chief, mayor defend supervised rave." National Post. March 28, 2000.  
 "50 charged in night club raid." National Post. December 18, 2000.

Greer, Shelly Sanders. "Danger parties." Toronto Star. March 22, 1997.

Grewal, San. "Flying blind." Toronto Star. December 11, 2001.

Grey, Colin. "Ecstasy use growing among adults, seniors." National Post. August 15, 2000.

Helpp, Sarah. "Where's drug education?" Toronto Star. July 10, 2001.

Houston, Andrea. "Woman dies after taking ecstasy." Toronto Star. June 28, 2000.

Humphreys, Adrian. "Police ecstatic at capture of sloppy pill smugglers." National Post. May 18, 2000.  
 "Flight attendant suspected of smuggling." National Post. September 28, 1999.

Keung, Nicholas. "Man killed in rave club shooting." Toronto Star. March 5, 2000.  
 "Raves worsen ecstasy: doctor." Toronto Star. May 10, 2000.

King, Romana. "Fantino backs new approach for pot cases." Toronto Star. June 5, 2000.

Laframboise, Donna. "The sky isn't falling." National Post. May 16, 2000.

Landale, Elisa. "Rave culture all the rage to 'connect'." Toronto Star. July 14, 1998.

Losch, Juanita. "Watch drinks for designer drugs, police warn nightclub goers." Toronto Star. March 31, 2000.

McLaren, Leah. "A change of scene." Globe and Mail. November 6, 1999.

Millar, Cal. "Police chiefs ask Ottawa for national drug campaign." Toronto Star. May 10, 2000.

Miranda, Amy. "After-hours clubs are the problem, not city's raves." Toronto Star. March 24, 2000.

Mitchell, Bob. "Record Ecstasy shipments seized." Toronto Star. January 18, 2000.

- "Coroner to probe rave death." Toronto Star. January 28, 2000.
- "Teens busted after record Ecstasy haul at Pearson." Toronto Star. February 1, 2000.
- "Police take aim at Ecstasy trade by organized groups." Toronto Star. February 2, 2000.
- "Drug lords find Toronto pure ecstasy." Toronto Star. February 26, 2000.
- "Ecstasy a rising portion of illegal drug imports." Toronto Star. January 29, 2001.
- "Officer charged with selling drugs." Toronto Star. August 29, 2001.

Moloney, Paul. "Ravers to give city demo." Toronto Star. July 14, 2000.

Morse, Rob. "The ecstasy of empathy." National Post. August 19, 2000.

Oziewicz, Estanislao. "Pair charged after ecstasy pills worth millions seized." Globe and Mail. December 26, 2000.

Parsons, Charlotte. "They only come out at night." Globe and Mail. October 9, 1993.  
 "The agony over ecstasy." Globe and Mail. October 9, 1993.

Picard, Andre. "Huge jump reported in use of ecstasy by Ontario students." Globe and Mail. June 13, 2000.

Potter, Mitch and Betsy Powell. "Agonizing over Ecstasy." Toronto Star. November 20, 1999.

Powell, Betsy. "Drugs, death and dancing." Toronto Star. May 7, 2000.  
 "Inquests' song remains the same." Toronto Star. May 7, 2000.

Prittie, Jennifer. "A political pastime." National Post. May 8, 2000.  
 "Inquest to focus on raves, not student who died." National Post. May 9, 2000.  
 "Dead raver's drug usage unclear." National Post. May 10, 2000.  
 "Rave promoter tried to meet city's rules." National Post. May 12, 2000.  
 "Rave drug unsafe in any amount-coroner." National Post. May 13, 2000.  
 "Ban won't stop raves, U.S. drug expert says." National Post. May 16, 2000.  
 "Officer in charge of crackdown didn't know about city's rave protocol." National Post. May 17, 2000.  
 "No antidote for Ecstasy abusers, doctor tells coroner's inquest." National Post. May 18, 2000.  
 "Ravers to get their say at inquest." National Post. May 22, 2000.  
 "Debate over raves turning into 'moral panic': U.S. expert." National Post. May 24, 2000.  
 "Lawyers seek rules on raves, not ban." National Post. May 26, 2000.  
 "Many questions left unanswered." National Post. May 30, 2000.

Quinn, Jennifer. "Man collapsed at rave, inquest told." Toronto Star. May 9, 2000.  
 "Police found ecstasy easily, inquest told." Toronto Star. May 16, 2000.

Ramshaw, Emily. "Exploring ecstasy's perils and potentials." *Toronto Star*. April 24, 2001.

Rankin, Jim. "Waging war on Yonge St." *Toronto Star*. February 15, 2000.

Raphael, Mitchel. "Corporate Perversion." *Toronto Star*. February 7, 1998.

"She wanted rave ban, now she's MC Fran." *National Post*. August 1, 2000.

"They're not going there just to get high." *National Post*. September 2, 1999.

"Government rants while kids rave." *National Post*. November 8, 1999.

"CBC examines lure of 'demon drugs'." *National Post*. December 6, 1999.

"Toronto council passes guidelines for raves." *National Post*. December 16, 1999.

"Drug harm reduction is the next 'safe sex'." *National Post*. December 22, 1999.

"Afraid of rave? Remember rock?" *National Post*. April 19, 2000.

"Rave promoters raise \$20 000 war chest." *National Post*. April 27, 2000.

Raphael, Mitchell and Todd Klinck. "Rave On." *National Post*. June 19, 1999.

Rayner, Ben. "Don't call this a rave anymore." *Toronto Star*. July 15, 1999.

"Flyer Art." *Toronto Star*. August 21, 1999.

"I'm sick of rants about raves." *Toronto Star*. March 25, 2000.

"Ecstasy's over but booze bounces back." *Toronto Star*. August 26, 2000.

"Film captures rave party night transformation." *Toronto Star*. September 23, 2000.

Ross, Bob. "'Poor man's ecstasy,' LSD is back again, officials say." *Toronto Star*. March 24, 1992.

Rusk, James. "City approves rave rules limiting venue and size." *Globe and Mail*. December 16, 1999.

"New dawn for ravers as deal reached on Toronto venues." *Globe and Mail*. August 4, 2000.

"Lastman wants ban on raves in Toronto." *Globe and Mail*. May 4, 2000.

Rusk, James and Gay Abbate. "Police chief takes charge of dealing with raves." *Globe and Mail*. May 11, 2000.

Rusk, James and Egle Procuto. "Council to allow raves on city property." *Globe and Mail*. August 3, 2000.

Sekeres, Matthew. "Police break designer drug ring in Ajax." *Globe and Mail*. July 26, 2000.

Slinger. "A tale of researchers, drug companies and job offers." *Toronto Star*. May 19, 2001.

Small, Peter. "Ecstasy now ranks as top street drug, coroner says." Toronto Star. May 15, 2000.

Smith, Graeme. "Taking Ecstasy can be a risky high for ravers." Toronto Star. December 9, 1997.

Southworth, Natalie. "Ecstasy trade sparked gang war, police say." Globe and Mail. March 25, 2000.

"Inquest begins with lesson on rave culture." Globe and Mail. May 9, 2000.

"Rave promoter favours licences." Globe and Mail. May 12, 2000.

"Education will reduce overdoses, inquest told." May 19, 2000.

"Ecstasy's grim toll rises again." Globe and Mail. June 28, 2000.

Stanford, Kim. "Raves offer youth safe environment." Toronto Star. April 7, 1997.

Swarbrick, Susan. "Ravers safer at Exhibition Place than in clubs, Pantalone says." National Post. April 25, 2000.

Talaga, Tanya. "Ecstasy use may cause depression: Study." Toronto Star. July 25, 2000.

Tucker-Abramson, Myka. "Rave reviews are mixed now." Toronto Star. February 23, 1999.

Verma, Sonja and Harold Levy. "Docks rave death probed." Toronto Star. February 5, 2001.

Walker, William. "The few, the proud, the stoned." Toronto Star. July 28, 2002.

Wanagan, Don. "Fantino behind Mel's about-face." National Post. May 10, 2000.

"Council puts temporary ban on city-run raves." National Post. May 11, 2000.

"Rave supporters remix Mayor's flip-flop on CD." National Post. July 25, 2000.

"A dance lesson for Mel Lastman." National Post. July 26, 2000.

"If we can regulate raves, why not sex?" National Post. December 18, 1999.

"Lastman seeks to ban raves at Exhibition Place." National Post. May 4, 2000.

"Father Julian missed his calling." National Post. May 13, 2000.

Wilson, Carl. "The Toronto rave scene through the eyes of the Pet Shop Boys." Globe and Mail. November 12, 1999.

Wood, Dianne. "Raves, raves go away." Toronto Star. August 3, 2000.

Yelaja, Prithi. "Academic freedom violated, MDs say." Toronto Star. September 6, 2001.

Author Not Specified:

"'Ecstasy' drug dubbed LSD of the 1990s." Toronto Star. June 8, 1989.

"Viagra finds favour with ravers." Toronto Star. May 22, 2000.

- "'Rave' drug can damage brain report warns." Toronto Star. June 15, 1999.
- "Right decision on raves." Toronto Star. August 6, 2000.
- " 'A' is for 'acid house' in new Oxford." Globe and Mail. July 5, 1990.
- "The agony and the ecstasy of raves in Toronto." Globe and Mail. May 13, 2000.
- "How to spot an ecstasy user." Globe and Mail. June 29, 1999.
- "Ecstasy pill lethal, Ottawa warns." Globe and Mail. September 28, 1996.
- "Council urged to allow raves on city property." Globe and Mail. July 29, 2000.
- "Rave on." National Post. August 4, 2000.
- "Death blamed on latest pop craze." Toronto Star. November 30, 1985.
- "New designer drug blamed." Toronto Star. February 7, 2001.
- "Police warn of drug." Toronto Star. October 16, 2000.
- "Two men face charges after girl dies in café." Globe and Mail. December 5, 2001.
- "Quebec: Six held as police close largest Ecstasy lab found in Canada." National Post. February 22, 2001.
- "I have beliefs. I have values." Toronto Star. February 24, 2001.



## APPENDICES

### HISTORY TIMELINE (As reported in selected newspapers)

- 1976 Canada restricted ecstasy. MDMA is listed in Schedule III of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Importing or trafficking in MDMA is a crime liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years. It is punished less harshly than cannabis (Schedule II) or cocaine (Schedule I). [United States restricted ecstasy in 1985]
- 1990 The Concise Oxford Dictionary, the authoritative guide to the English language "embraces drug oriented youth cults" and included a definition of ecstasy as "a powerful stimulant and hallucinogenic drug".
- 1990 Ecstasy, raves made their first appearance in Toronto.
- 1994 Several raves were being held every weekend in Toronto.
- 1996 T.R.I.P. (Toronto Raver Information Project) was in existence.
- 1997 University of Windsor student, Robert Drake, was charged with manufacturing ecstasy at the school lab.
- 1998 On November 2, British medical Journal, The Lancet, said ravers risk memory loss and other brain damage if they took ecstasy.
- 1999 On April 6, Robert Drake was sentenced to 23 months in reformatory for using University of Windsor laboratories to manufacture ecstasy.

In July, Kieran Kelly, 21, of Brampton, died during a three-day rave held in Sauble Beach. His body was found almost a month later.

In August, a 20-year-old suffered a drug-related death while partying at a popular Toronto rave club.

In September, a 23-year old Port Hawksbury, Nova Scotia, man died of an apparent overdose during Atlantic Canada's largest rave.

On September 28, a flight attendant was arrested after nearly 10 000 tablets of ecstasy were found hidden inside candy tins.

In October, Raving in Toronto: Peace, Love, Unity, Respect in Transition was published in the Journal of Youth Studies.

On October 10, Allan Ho, a 20-year old Ryerson student, died after taking ecstasy at a rave in an underground parking garage. Mr. Ho's case was eventually chosen as a representative example of an ecstasy-related death.

On November 4, Consumer Affairs Minister Bob Runciman announced he would hold a summit with police and city officials from around the province to discuss ways to crack down on raves.

On December 6, Demon Drugs, a three-part CBC Radio One documentary examining ecstasy was aired.

On December 11, Mayor Lastman took a trip to Amsterdam and came back "enlightened".

On December 15, in a 39-0 vote Toronto council passed the Protocol for the Operation of Safe Rave Events, which outlined health and safety regulations to be followed at legal raves.

2000 On January 27, Dr. Bonita Porter, deputy chief coroner for inquests, announced an inquest would be held to examine the risks and dangers ecstasy users face and the raves where it is being consumed.

On February 14, The Web, a club in downtown Toronto was the scene of a fatal shooting.

On February 15, the Toronto Star ran an article claiming the new crop of dealers were "all the boy next door, girl next door, young and good looking type".

In March, Darin Cooper, a 10-year veteran of the Toronto police force, was arrested after using police-issue equipment to rob drug dealers in a scheme to put the stolen money toward bankrolling the importation of around \$6-million worth of Ecstasy.

On March 4, a bouncer at the Spin Cat club was fatally shot in the head and three others injured after two men refused to allow the bouncer to do a body search.

On March 15, a top Toronto drug enforcement official claimed that Toronto was the ecstasy capital of North America.

On March 24, Toronto police say the lucrative trade in ecstasy has caused a violent turf war in after-hour clubs in the downtown area.

On March 25, Operation Strike Force, a special squad created to focus on the proliferation of guns in Toronto, was created.

On March 28, Toronto's mayor and police chief hailed the largest ever city-sanctioned rave as a success and pledged their continued involvement in such dances.

In April, Chris Samojlenko, a Toronto rave promoter, was told he needed triple the number of off duty officers than specified in the safe rave protocol.

In April, Mayor Lastman backed out of a news conference where he and the police chief were supposed to jointly raise concerns about a perceived drug problem at city-sanctioned raves.

On April 19, Maclean's magazine ran a cover story about raves and ecstasy.

On April 20, a task force set up by Sandra Pupatello, a Liberal MPP, released *Dancing In The Dark*, a video full of dire warnings about ecstasy.

On April 25, Toronto police Superintendent Ron Taverner said his officers believed 80% of those who attended a large weekend rave were using or selling drugs.

On April 26, about 75 rave promoters and members of the city's electronic music scene gathered to raise money for a "war chest" to hire legal representation for the coroner's inquest into the death of Allan Ho.

On April 27, Toronto police chief, Julian Fantino, called for a national drug strategy and extended an invitation to Prime Minister Jean Chretien to come to Toronto to see what the kids are up to.

On May 3, Mayor Lastman claimed that raves could not be controlled and should be banned.

On May 3, Matthew Crane, a 23-year old University of Waterloo computer science student, appeared in provincial court to face drug charges after police in Kitchener shut down his illicit designer drug business being run out of an industrial strip mall.

On May 3, a private members bill called The Raves Act 2000 was introduced in the Ontario legislature by Windsor West MPP Sandra Pupatello.

On May 8, the Allan Ho inquest began.

On May 10, a badly divided Toronto council put a temporary ban on city-run raves. A deferral motion to delay the vote until after the coroner's inquest was defeated by a single vote.

On May 15, Ontario's deputy chief coroner, Jim Cairns, claimed ecstasy was the top street drug in Ontario.

On May 16, undercover police claim it took only 30 seconds after they started working a rave to make an ecstasy purchase.

On May 16, Superintendent Ron Taverner, the officer in charge of Operation Strike Force, told the inquest that he was not aware until February or March that the city had passed a protocol-although one of his senior officers helped draft the guidelines.

On May 16, five British Columbia residents were arrested after 170 000 pills arrived on a Paris-to-Toronto flight.

On May 17, Allan Ho's mother, Mui Phuong, spoke at the inquest and claimed that raves should be banned.

On May 18, Joyce Bernstein, an epidemiologist with the Toronto public health department, told the inquest jury that harm reduction was the route the city should take.

On May 18, The Raves Act 2000 unexpectedly passed second reading after a lively debate in which some MPP's harked back to their own footloose youths, and even quoted Bob Dylan.

On May 22, the Toronto Star reported that Viagra was coming into favour at raves to combat sexual dysfunction caused by ecstasy.

On May 23, Philip Jenkins, a professor of history and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University testified about "moral panic's" at the Allan Ho inquest.

Over the May 24 weekend, three deaths involving Ecstasy occurred in the Oshawa and Ajax areas. None of the deaths had any connection with raves.

On May 25, the Allan Ho inquest ended on a surprising note of consensus, as a variety of lawyers urged the coroner's jury to adopt broadly similar recommendations. The jury offered a list of 27 non-binding recommendations aimed at preventing future tragedies.

On June 2, the RCMP issued a three-paragraph news release explaining that a math error occurred during the measurement of ecstasy seized on May 16.

On June 27, a 21-year old woman, Beth Robertson, died from kidney and liver failure after leaving a downtown Toronto rave. Ms. Robertson was the 14<sup>th</sup> person in Ontario to die from Ecstasy.

On July 7, an ecstasy lab in Markham, making an estimated 20 000 tabs a week, was shut down by police.

On July 8, a 16-year old, Daniel Engson, died inside a downtown Toronto rave after taking what he believed was ecstasy.

On July 24, the novelty CD, Strike Back, was released by the Toronto Dance Safe Committee. The six-minute composition ridiculed the Mayor for condemning a music and entertainment genre he had no first hand knowledge of, based on hearsay passed to him by the police chief.

On July 25, a study conducted by the Center for Addiction and Mental Health showed a 50% to 80% reduction in serotonin in a deceased ecstasy user's brain.

On July 30, the pre-party for the upcoming iDance rally was held. In attendance was Councillor Frances Nunziata.

In August, a 13-year old Halifax girl was rushed to the hospital after she swallowed two Ecstasy pills.

On August 1, the eve of an expected vote to lift the suspension on raves, an estimated 12000 people descended on Nathan Phillips Square, at what was called the iDance rally, to protest.

On August 3, Toronto council voted 50-4 to allow raves at municipal facilities, but it took five hours of debate over two days to do so.

On August 5, while awaiting trial police officer Darin Cooper was arrested for breaking bail.

On August 10, Customs inspectors at the Port of Montreal discovered \$11 million worth of ecstasy hidden in boxes of tire rims originating from Belgium.

On December 6, an RCMP intelligence report stated that clandestine labs were flourishing in Canada due to the lack of government regulation over the sale of chemicals.

On December 17, Toronto police arrest 50 people, including members of outlaw motorcycle gangs, at a downtown nightclub.

2001 On January 29, Canadian Customs officers at Pearson Airport stated they believed 'it's only a matter of time before somebody tries swallowing ecstasy to bring it into the country'.

On February 4, during a rave at The Docks nightclub Salim Jabaji was stabbed and died at the scene.

On February 7, Peel region police said a death previously blamed on ecstasy was the result of an overdose of PMA.

On February 21, Toronto police officer Darin Cooper pled guilty to three armed robberies.

On February 22, in Mont-Laurier Quebec, the RCMP dismantled what it called the largest Ecstasy lab uncovered in Canada.

On February 22, Attorney General Anne McLellan stated the government would put more resources toward anti-drug efforts, after being criticized by the United Nations.

On February 28, Darin Cooper was sentenced to nine years in prison.

On August 28, veteran Peel region police officer Christopher Walpole was charged with selling ecstasy to an undercover officer.

On October 28, two people died in the hospital from apparently taking ecstasy at a rave in British Columbia.

On December 1, 17-year old Nicole Malik died in a downtown Internet café after taking what police suspect was ecstasy.

On December 5, two employees of the Internet café where Nicole Malik died were charged with her death.

2002 On July 28, the Toronto Star ran an article claiming that ecstasy was the drug of choice for soldiers.

On September 27, a study in the journal *Science* suggested that ecstasy may increase a person's risk for developing Parkinsonism.

On September 30, Detective Howard Page of the vice squad run by the Toronto Police Service claimed that GHB was poised to become the favoured recreational drug in the club scene.

On October 8, the two-year old daughter of actors Jude Law and Sadie Frost swallowed part of an ecstasy tablet and was rushed to the hospital.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To illustrate the constructed nature of the "problem", research questions were developed. The research questions asked for this study were:

### **1 Description of coverage**

- 1.1 How much coverage did ecstasy and raves receive in the selected newspapers?
- 1.2 Was coverage more extensive in some periods than others?
- 1.3 Was ecstasy news featured on the front page or in less prominent parts of the paper?
- 1.4 How often were photographs used to illustrate the content of articles

### **2 Conceptualization of the "ecstasy problem"**

- 2.1 What subjects (topics) were covered?
- 2.2 What was the impact level of the article?
- 2.3 How was ecstasy described?
- 2.4 What studies, reports were used to support arguments made?

### **3 The identification of claims-makers**

- 3.1 Who were the most frequently mentioned definers of the problem (individuals/organizations)?
- 3.2 What were their expressed opinions?

### **4 Descriptions of users**

- 4.1 According to newspaper coverage, who used ecstasy?
- 4.2 Did the description of users change over time?

## **Measurement procedures and analysis plan**

The procedures to measure each research question were as follows:

Research question one referred to the newspaper reporting trends about ecstasy. The following procedures were used:

- A. The total number of news articles was tallied to determine the amount of coverage.
- B. The number of printed lines in each article was recorded as a second indicator of coverage.
- C. Absolute coverage was broken down by year, and then also by month.
- D. To determine the prominence of ecstasy coverage, a count was made of the page number on which each article appeared.
- E. The number of photographs included was counted and a description written down.<sup>19</sup>
- F. Each newspaper article was read and assigned to a particular category of presentation.

<sup>19</sup> Poor quality of some of the microfilm print made analysis of all photographs impossible.



Categories of presentation included:

General interest: Articles with scopes so general that classifying them under a single category would have been misleading.

Violence/Crime: Articles about violence and criminal activities related to ecstasy.

Public warning: Articles that warned, and no more, about new versions of ecstasy or other drugs being sold as ecstasy.

Editorial: Articles written by members of the public regarding ecstasy or related issues.

Scientific research: Articles about research concerning ecstasy, including research concerning prevalence of use.

Miscellaneous: Articles that did not fit into any of the aforementioned categories.

\* It should be noted that other categories were included, but omitted after producing no results.

Research question two referred to the conceptualization of ecstasy in news coverage. In research question two the following procedures were used:

- A. The headline under which each news article appeared was recorded. Next, a brief summary of the article was written.
- B. Coding categories were developed for the main topics that were discussed. The frequency of each category's appearance was recorded.
- C. When a news article gave a description of ecstasy it was written down. The descriptions were then content analyzed for themes and compared to determine changes across time periods.

Research question three referred to the primary definers of the "ecstasy problem". The following procedures were used in research question number three:

- A. Names of the newsmakers, their affiliations or governmental agencies mentioned in the newspaper articles were compiled on a list. To determine the frequency of occurrence a count was done of the number of articles in which each of the newsmakers was mentioned. Those with the most mentions were selected for analysis.
- B. The expressed opinions of these newsmakers were recorded. Any changes over time were noted.

Research question four referred to descriptions of the ecstasy users. The following procedures were used in question number four:

- A. A frequency count was done for articles that described demographic characteristics such as sex, age, ethnic origin and occupation of ecstasy users. These characteristics were compared over time.
- B. A list was made of the reasons given for ecstasy use.
- C. Consequences of ecstasy use, both positive and negative, were recorded.

**VITA AUCTORIS**

**NAME:** Sean Miller

**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Windsor, Ontario

**YEAR OF BIRTH:** 1977

**EDUCATION:** Essex District High School, Essex, Ontario  
1991-1996

University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario  
1996-2000 B.A. (Honours Criminology)

2000-2003 M.A. (Sociology)